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16-PAGE LIMIT BREAK

# FINAL FANTASY® XII

LEADS OUR

# 30TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

- **SHINJI HASHIMOTO** EXPLORES FINAL FANTASY'S RICH LEGACY
- THE MAKING OF FFXII AS IT ENTERS **THE ZODIAC AGE**

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## THE NINJA WARRIORS

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TAITO'S MULTISCREEN SMASH

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THE HISTORY OF THE ATARI 8-BIT, VIC-20 AND COMMODORE 64 SPECIALIST

Future
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## REVISITING STARCRAFT

HOW BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT CREATED ITS GENRE-PUSHING RTS

## ALSO INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

OBSIDIAN • LICENCE TO THRILL: PLATOON
DAVID KELLY • SEGA MEGA MODEM



# THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FINAL FANTASY GAME?




## DARRAN JONES

I'm going to go with *Final Fantasy VIII*. It has one of the best opening sequences of any videogame.
**Expertise:**
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
**Currently playing:**
*Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Strider*




## NICK THORPE

I could lie and say something else, but it's *Final Fantasy VII*. I was so engrossed that I took my PlayStation on holiday so I could keep playing it.
**Expertise:**
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)
**Currently playing:**
*Puyo Puyo Tetris*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sonic The Hedgehog*




## DREW SLEEP

Only one!? You sadist, Darran. Obviously it's *FFVIII* – it had such a profound effect on me growing up. I used to wear multiple belts to be like Squall – no regrets.
**Expertise:**
Bailing out on deadline
**Currently playing:**
*Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows Of Valentia*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Final Fantasy VIII*




## SAM RIBBITS

Even though I owned both a PSone and PS2, I'd somehow managed to unintentionally avoid all the mainline *FF* games. I did enjoy *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* a lot, though.
**Expertise:**
Pixels
**Currently playing:**
*Pokémon Silver*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*




## DAVID CROOKES

*Final Fantasy VII* made RPGs popular, so it has to be a favourite just for being so genre-defining.
**Expertise:**
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)
**Currently playing:**
*Darwinia*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Broken Sword*




## GRAEME MASON

*Final Fantasy VII* on the PlayStation. I remember being stunned by the sheer breadth of it, as well as the amazing art.
**Expertise:**
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
**Currently playing:**
*Rage*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Resident Evil 4*




## PAUL DRURY

Like so many of us, my first and indeed last experience with the series was *VII*. And I never did get to the crying bit.
**Expertise:**
Type in listings
**Currently playing:**
*Nex Machina*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sheep In Space*




## MARTYN CARROLL

*Final Fantasy Legend III* on the Game Boy. It's the only entry I've really enjoyed and I even managed to finish it!
**Expertise:**
Sinclair stuff
**Currently playing:**
*Rime*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Jet Set Willy*



## ANDREW FISHER

*Final Fantasy VII* is the only one I really got into; others I have tried briefly.
**Expertise:**
Commodore 64 and Nintendo player for over 30 years
**Currently playing:**
*Talisman Digital Edition*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Paradroid*

# LOADING...




**I eventually purchased and played *Final Fantasy XII* for no other reason than my cousin wouldn't stop going on about it (he's very pleased about the new HD update by the way) so I wanted to see what all the fuss was about.**

It felt quite unlike any other *Final Fantasy* game I've ever played, particularly when it came to the game's combat, and while I never completed it, I enjoyed what I experienced and it was clear to see that it was taking both the genre and the series in very exciting directions. So this month, we not only have a feature on the creation of Square's original PlayStation 2 release (the first time a PS2 game has featured on the cover I might add) but we have also put aside ten additional pages to celebrate the franchise's 30th anniversary.

But don't worry, if you can't tell your Squalls from your Clouds and have no idea what a Chocobo is, as there's still plenty to sink your teeth into this issue. We take a look at the entire 8-bit Codemasters range, go behind the scenes of *StarCraft* and Obsidian, and celebrate the 35th anniversary of the mighty Commodore 64. There's plenty more too, covering all generations of retro. In short, there's a little something for everybody.

Enjoy the magazine!



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**>> Load 170** Breathing new life into classic games






## RETRO RADAR



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# DISCOVERING SKY SKIPPER

## Van Burnham charts the restoration of a lost classic

**The year was 1981; *Donkey Kong* was the runaway hit of the summer and its Japanese manufacturer, Nintendo, was hot for a follow-up.** Nintendo Of America had just recently been established to distribute Nintendo Japan's arcade and handheld games in the United States. Based just outside Seattle, as close as it could get in the US to its parent company, Nintendo Co. Ltd. of Kyoto, the company was an unlikely upstart led by Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi's son-in-law, Minoru Arakawa.

Back in Japan, Nintendo's R&D was still in its infancy and engineers were jockeying for Yamauchi's favour. The next arcade game slated for release was *Sky Skipper*, designed by Genyo Takeda and *Donkey Kong* creator Shigeru Miyamoto, with engineering assistance by Ikegami Tsushinki. It incorporated gameplay elements referencing the history of Nintendo – which started off as a manufacturer of hanafuda and western-style playing cards – it was sure to win Yamauchi over.

In the game, your character 'Mr. You' pilots a biplane that flies around collecting different playing card characters to build flushes of each suit – spade, heart, diamond, and club – for extra bonus points. Meanwhile, huge gorillas attempt to thwart you as you loop around the scrolling screen, dodging various obstacles, and clouds.

Unfortunately, the game tested poorly in Japan and was not widely released.

A dozen *Sky Skipper* upright cabinets arrived at the port of Seattle for Nintendo Of America to evaluate for the US market. According to former warehouse manager and QA lead, Howard Phillips, the games were put out to test at the Spot Tavern and two 7-Elevens on Route 99 near SeaTac airport.

Though many people love the game (now playable via MAME) and consider it highly underrated, in reality *Sky Skipper* did not earn well on location. The challenging play control and ever-present danger were factors that turned



» Proud parents Alex Crowley and Whitney Roberts pose beside *Sky Skipper* at the US reveal.

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» The *Sky Skipper* arcade machine in all its pixel perfect glory. Someone at Nintendo clearly loves gorillas.

> **“Sky Skipper was a confusing thematic mess with hip gorillas and Alice in Wonderland card rabbits”**
> Howard Philips

many players off. It also had a lot going on, possibly too much, which may have depressed appeal. According to Howard, "*Sky Skipper* was a confusing thematic mess with sneakered hip gorillas, *Skip-To-My-Lou* music, and *Alice In Wonderland* card rabbits."

The next game on deck was *Popeye*, licensed from King Features. Nintendo had a long history of licensing popular characters for its products, most notably its deal with Disney in the Fifties to distribute Mickey Mouse playing cards and later Game & Watches. According to Miyamoto, the *Popeye* characters were actually slated for an early iteration of *Donkey Kong*, but Nintendo wasn't able to secure the license at that time.

Also designed by Miyamoto and Genyo Takeda, *Popeye* was a sweet horizontal platformer with multiple levels that pitted Popeye against Bluto in a battle for Olive's heart… literal hearts, that is, which floated down through the playfield and had to be rescued before they perished in the water below. Popeye could punch objects and eat spinach to make him invincible.

*Popeye* was put out to test and fared much better than *Sky Skipper* on location. Given the low earnings, it was decided to abandon Mr. You and focus on Popeye and pals. Don James, NOA's executive VP of operations, and employee number two, confirmed that the only deciding factor in scrapping *Sky Skipper* was that it tested so poorly. *Popeye* was approved for production and released in 1982. (Interestingly, *Popeye* was licensed by Atari for exclusive release in the UK.)

*Sky Skipper*, along with *Popeye*, was ported to the Atari 2600 by Parker Bros., but aside from that cartridge it was otherwise lost to history. The test cabinets were destroyed, existing boards repurposed to play *Popeye*, and the arcade game was quickly and unceremoniously forgotten.

That is, until a team of inspired collectors rescued it from extinction.

In 2015, UK collector Alex Crowley was searching for *Sky Skipper* to complete his Nintendo arcade collection – which already included such rare early games as *Space Launcher* and *Sheriff* – and he finally found what appeared to be a *Sky Skipper* boardset at a retired operator's warehouse in Newcastle. Soon after he bought another from a collector in Sweden.

They were both original 'TNX' boards – the production code given to *Sky Skipper* – that were factory-converted to *Popeye* back in 1981.

The boards were handed over to engineer Mark Whiting, who was given the difficult task of deconverting them back to *Sky Skipper*. After a few months of arduous engineering they were miraculously able to boot and play *Sky Skipper* once again. The second board was then sold to Whitney Roberts and the two collectors hatched a very ambitious plan. Their dream? To recreate a *Sky Skipper* upright cabinet as originally designed by Nintendo.

The only image that existed of the game was a tiny black-and-white photo from the sales flyer, so it was difficult to know what colours were used in the design. Then a rare Japanese flyer was found that included a larger colour picture of *Sky Skipper*. It was a start. But they needed much more. Whitney had a feeling that Nintendo Of America might be able to help them and enlisted videogame player of the century and star of *King Of Kong*, Billy Mitchell, to put him in touch with executives at NOA who graciously researched its archives.

As it turned out, NOA still had one of the original *Sky Skipper* cabinets in storage. Serial #00001 had been saved!

Now with the help of NOA and access to the only known surviving original game they were able to scan the artwork on the cabinet and finally recreate *Sky Skipper*'s unique marquee, control panel, and side art. From those scans the artwork was restored in Photoshop by Olly Cotton – not an easy trick given that colours had faded and stickers were worn – in partnership with Richard Lint of This Old Game who produced the final reproduced art for *Sky Skipper*.

The first completed game was revealed on 10 June at the Southern Fried Gameroom Expo in Atlanta and the second *Sky Skipper* will debut in the United Kingdom at Play Expo in Manchester on 14 October. Now you have an opportunity to play *Sky Skipper* and decide for yourself if it deserved its day at the arcade. *

**For more information head to skyskipperproject.com and playexpomanchester.com.**











» The reveal of *Sky Skipper* is documented at the Southern Fried Gameroom Expo in Atlanta.




© Image by Julian Eggebrecht

## ROGUE FACTOR

**How Factor 5 ended up repairing a Sky Skipper machine**

Toward the end of the 20th century Factor 5 was one of the hottest developers for the SNES and N64, creating such legendary games as *Rogue Squadron* for LucasArts. Factor 5 founder and arcade collector Julian Eggebrecht had seen *Sky Skipper* at NOA and had a favour to ask of Nintendo: if Factor 5 managed to ship *Rogue Leader* on schedule, he requested NOA let him borrow the machine for the F5 arcade. The challenge was accepted, they miraculously shipped on time, and *Sky Skipper* was delivered to Factor 5. But when they fired up the game the colours looked wrong. Opening up the machine the team realised one of the colour PROMs was dead. Julian reached out to Genyo Takeda, then head of hardware for Nintendo Japan and one of the directors of *Sky Skipper*, who managed to locate the original files in their archives enabling Julian to repair it. Regarding Takeda, Julian said, "He fondly remembered *Sky Skipper* since it was the only time Miyamoto-san worked for him." Suddenly those gorillas make a lot of sense.

## SEGA STALLS

### NEW SEGA PROJECT FALLS FOUL OF FANS



**Sega recently announced Sega Forever, a Netflix-styled platform for iOS and Android.** Initially launching with five Mega Drive games, Sega is planning to add more games every few weeks and intends to cover everything from the SG-1000 and Game Gear to the Saturn and Dreamcast.

Sadly, things haven't gone smoothly for the launch and it has been plagued with poor emulation issues, as well as purchase issues that affected *Sonic The Hedgehog*. "Directly following the launch, some users who had previously purchased the premium version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* saw ads and had issues restoring purchases," explained Sega Network's chief marketing officer, Mike Evans, who is overseeing the new project. "We reacted to this within 24 hours, published an update that implemented a fix and reached out to impacted users individually."

The question now, is whether the Unity-based platform will be able to improve performance and what the state of the incoming Saturn and Dreamcast games will be like. "Both Saturn and Dreamcast are complex systems [so] emulation will always be a challenge," explains Mike. "Because of this, we took the decision to port these games from these systems, rather than using an emulator. This allows deeper customisation of controls and an optimal experience when working off highly sophisticated console code bases."

While it hasn't had the best of starts, we love the idea. Here's hoping Sega can fix its current issues and deliver a service that does its classic games justice.






# MORE MINI MAGIC

### THE REVEALED SNES MINI HAS A CRACKING LINEUP OF GAMES

**Ever since Nintendo released the NES Mini gamers the world over have been asking one simple question – when is the SNES Mini coming out?**

It would appear that the answer is shortly, as Nintendo revealed the new system was on its way just as we were going to press. As with the original NES Mini, the SNES version looks delightful, being a miniaturised version of the classic console. It features fewer games than its NES counterpart (21, in fact) but that was to be expected when you consider how much larger SNES games tend to be.




Once again, Nintendo has looked to third parties to ensure that the available games are as good as they can be, and while some will moan about the lack of *Chrono Trigger* or *Axelay*, there's no denying that Nintendo has made a solid effort to reacquire many of the machine's most important games. *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, *Megaman X* and *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* appear, courtesy of Capcom, Konami is supplying *Contra III: The Alien Wars* and *Super Castlevania IV*, while *Secret Of Mana*, *Final Fantasy III* and *Super Mario RPG* are appearing via Square Enix.

Nintendo's own games are equally strong, and include *Super Mario World*, *Super Mario Kart*, *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, *Super Metroid*, *Earthbound* and *Super Punchout!!*. The biggest news by far though is the fact that *Star Fox 2*, a previously-unreleased game is being included. Dylan Cuthbert, who was involved with the original, has already expressed his delight and this version does appear to be different to the ROM that's been available online for several years, which makes its inclusion tremendously exciting.

*Earthbound* is another big deal as it never arrived in Europe and now sells for close to £1,000 when it's in mint condition. In fact, many of the included games will cost you a small fortune if you want original complete versions, making the SNES Mini a cheap, official alternative. Nintendo has also revealed that all the included games will be the NTSC versions, meaning we won't have to deal with ugly squashed borders or slower running games and that there will be better stock allocation (although many preorders were out of stock at the time of writing this article). The system itself also includes longer leads and comes packed with a second controller, which probably helps explain why it features a higher £80 pricetag. Expect more news in a later issue. *




WHITEDAY
a labyrinth named school

## Gunstar Heroes Soundtrack

Data Discs' latest vinyl might be expensive, but it's arguably one of the most desirable-looking titles it has so far released. Everything about it screams quality, from its separately coloured red-and-blue LPs (a standard black version is also available) to its stunning Japanese artwork found on each LP's sleeve. This Data Discs release also includes a portrait double-sided poster with the Western art on one side and the superior Japanese art on the other.

The soundtrack itself is on par with earlier vinyl from the company and surprisingly bass-heavy to boot. Every single track from the classic Mega Drive hit has been included, allowing you to truly appreciate Norio 'NON' Hanzawa's compositions.

**Price:** £24.99 **From:** data-discs.com

PICK OF THE MONTH

## Castlevania II: Simon's Quest Soundtrack

Released to celebrate *Castlevania*'s 30th anniversary, *Simon's Quest* is another exclusive vinyl from Mondo, and it has us excited for the impending *Super Castlevania IV* soundtrack. Pressed onto a ten-inch LP and featuring gorgeous new artwork by Eric Powell it marks the first time the soundtrack has ever received a vinyl release. It's amazingly comprehensive as well, with both the NES and Famicom soundtracks being included, which should be a pleasant surprise for those who have never played the original Japanese release.

**Price:** $25.00 **From:** mondotees.com




## Pac-Man Epic Fail Mug

There are a number of *Pac-Man* mugs available, but this is one of our favourites. The officially licensed 10oz capacity mug features the iconic videogame character caught in a very compromising situation with no escape. The print is found on both sides of the mug as well, meaning you can enjoy the comically tragic scene no matter how you drink your beverage.

**Price:** £9.99
**From:** funstockretro.co.uk

## Classic Gaming: Volume 3

Created by sister magazine *games™*, this is effectively some of the best content from its always-informative retro section. Highlights include interviews with David Darling and John Romero, behind the scenes articles on *God Of War*, *Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Destruction Derby*, as well as genre-defining classics such as *Metal Gear Solid*, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Space Invaders* and *Half-Life 2*. The 148-page tome also features a variety of in-depth guides that examines some of gaming's biggest franchises, including *Resident Evil*, *Final Fantasy*, *Donkey Kong* and *Pac-Man*.

**Price:** £9.99 **From:** myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

## X91 90s-Style Controller

Fans of the Nineties may want to investigate the latest Microsoft-compatible controller from Hyperkin. Available in three different colours: red, white and black, it's effectively been designed to look like a classic controller from the Nineties and feels surprisingly pleasing to hold. The small nature of the pad means that those with bigger hands will find annoyances with the close placement of the D-pad and the start buttons, but that's the only real issue we noticed.

**Price:** £39.99
**From:** funstockretro.co.uk


Discover The Masterpiece
That Rewrote The Rules Of Fear
WHITEDAY
a labyrinth named school

**Here's my bio… Paul Rose**
Paul Rose is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator and chief writer of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes for kids TV, but can still be found rambling on about games, old and new, for his daily website, Digitiser2000.com.

# "Ban this sick filth!"

**I tell you what I miss – games being dangerous.** Do you remember how we were told that games were going to corrupt an entire generation, turning us all into a society of deranged killers? If you'd extrapolated from the scaremongering of the early Nineties, by now we were meant to be living in a sort of violent, *Mad Max* dystopia. Alright, things aren't perfect in the world, but I'm not sure its ills have much to do with *Duke Nukem* saying, "Shake it, baby!" while waving a $20 bill at a pixelated stripper.

It was inevitable, of course, that sooner or later games would be assimilated, and just become another part of popular culture. However, in the early Nineties, as graphics started becoming more realistic, people started getting scared. Tabloids screamed about 'Videogame Nasties', the issue of violent videogames was discussed in Parliament, and the US Senate held a hearing about it – such was the grave threat it posed to our safety. All of that has, more or less, been forgotten.

Do you remember the fuss over *Carmageddon*? Do you recall that they forced the game's creators to change the blood to green? When the game was rereleased recently, with the blood and gore back to being red, nobody even batted an eyelid. The Mega-CD interactive movie *Night Trap* is also making a comeback, and nobody even cares that it was claimed, upon its 1992 release, to have promoted violence towards women.

I kind of get the fuss over *Mortal Kombat*, and its visceral finishing move porn, but it seems astonishing now that even something as relatively innocuous as *Street Fighter II* was categorised alongside it.

It wasn't all about the violence of course; there was also the threat to the health of the nation's youth. The arcade game *Sonic Blast Man* was blamed for breaking people's wrists. *Pokémon* was going to give us all epilepsy. Even the 1995 new-age puzzler *Endorfun* threatened to brainwash us with its subliminal messages promoting spiritual wellbeing.

I mean, it has been years now since a proper videogame outrage – in the UK at least. Even the violent, cynical misogyny of *Grand Theft Auto V* – still breaking sales records and topping the charts several years after its release – is held up as one of the British games industry's crowning achievements. Video Game Tax Relief – for games created in the UK – is even a thing now. The games industry has been embraced by the government itself. It is seen, legitimately, as a positive thing.

There was something about that controversy which made our hobby feel dangerous – and that made it more compelling, like we were part of something we should've never been a part of… as was always the way whenever the establishment has 'banned' or been shocked by something.

We've not gone all the way to selling out, of course. Games still have 'edge'. At least until Kitana from *Mortal Kombat* is seen advertising Country Life butter by ripping out Johnny Rotten's spine. *



"There was something about that controversy which made our hobby feel dangerous"

**Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:**

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag darran.jones@futurenet.com



# Eugene Jarvis

The legendary game designer on joining forces with Housemarque to bring us Nex Machina

**Last year, Sony revealed that Housemarque, the developer behind the *Defender*-inspired *Resogun*, is teaming up with *Defender*'s creator, Eugene Jarvis, to create a brand-new twin-stick shooter, called *Nex Machina*.** We caught up with the legendary game designer to find out how things were progressing.

**How did the collaboration with Housemarque came about?**

I met the Housemarque guys at DICE in Vegas a couple years back and we were kicking back more than a few pints at the bar riffing on how awesome *Resogun* was and where was the next killer move. We started fantasising about a *Robotron*-inspired, twin-stick shooter, and when I woke up I was on a 14-hour flight to Helsinki with one hell of a hangover.

**Do you personally view *Nex Machina* as a spiritual successor to *Robotron: 2084*?**

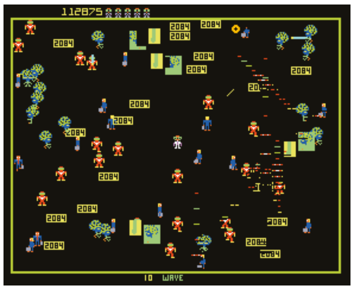
It's kind of like finding the next Dali Lama. Is the iPhone the spiritual successor to the Apple II? At some point, if they're successful, new creations become their own thing! As we dial in *Nex Machina*, each new build is more insane than the previous one – with tech that is maybe a billion times more powerful than the original *Robotron*. The challenge is no longer how to make the game challenging enough to take the player to the brink of sanity; no, it is more of an effort to keep the player's consciousness from crossing over the event horizon and irreversibly sucking into the imploding dark matter of oblivion. Nothing will matter after that.

**What does your role as a creative consultant entail? Were you not tempted to do some coding?**

There were a few times when it just seemed so much easier to whip out my keyboard and lay down some righteous code, but I soon realised that 1) the Housemarque coders crank out some of the tightest mind-blowing algos I've ever seen, and 2) unfortunately in the last few decades, I've crossed over that very same event horizon a few too many times to create anything resembling a robust routine, much less an actual coherent thought! It was a total rush to work with the *Nex Machina* creatives. There were times when I felt a telepathic connection with Harry [Krueger] and his team as we hashed out the story of the game and some of its basic infrastructure, which then had to be pushed to the nth power.



» [PS4] Most modern-day shooters have huge bosses to shoot down and *Nex Machina* is no exception.



» [Arcade] *Robotron* remains one of the most influential shooters of all time, spawning the twin-stick concept.

**How does working on *Nex Machina* compare to the creation of your earlier games?**

It's a different experience, a different role. Kind of like the difference between Yoda in *Star Wars*, and Seventies cop hero Dirty Harry. In my earlier work I'm Dirty Harry, the badass control freak street cop with total domain over my beat, making my day taking out street punks and code bugs with my massive Smith and Wesson .44 magnum. Today, I'm some kind of spiritual guru dude sipping lattes and evil Finnish homebrews trying to impart the wisdom of the ages onto code slingers and pixel wranglers younger than my first-gen iPad, not to mention my Nokia brick phone.

**Has there been any more development on the potential arcade version?**

We are currently building the first prototypes. I can't wait to try them out as I think the human interface factors in the arcade game will give us humans a leg up! Reaction times and frame lag could be even quicker with our alt-beast liquid metal cooled arcade PC. The truth will come out.



» [PS4] Eugene Jarvis is taking an advisory role. Think of his as Yoda, but not the rubbish CGI version from the prequels.

READ THE FULL REVIEW: p104



» [PS4] Like *Resogun* before it, *Nex Machina* is powered by voxels. Expect some impressive looking explosions.

> **"In my earlier work I'm Dirty Harry, the badass control freak street cop"**
> Eugene Jarvis

**What does *Nex Machina* offer over similar twin-stick shooters?**

I really can't think of anything quite like it, to be honest. The frenetic pace of complex action, tactics, story, and voxel/morphing/environmental effects has never been approached. Right now it's just about finishing up the environments and tweaking the parameters for the ultimate action game ever. *


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# The Harvest Moon Hero

Readers take us through the retro keyhole



## BIO

**NAME:** Sophie Tabak

**LOCATION:** Ontario, Canada

**ESTIMATED VALUE:** $2,500 (CAD)

**FAVOURITE SYSTEM:** N64

**FAVOURITE GAME:** The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

"I REMEMBER THINKING, 'WOW THIS LOOKS SO REAL!' AND BEING UNABLE TO BELIEVE EVERYTHING WAS IN THREE DIMENSIONS"

**It's not always about the size of a collection to us here at Retro Gamer, but also the stories behind the games, and the personal meaning behind some of the items.** Sophie, from Ontario, Canada, has a strong affinity with the Nintendo Game Boy, a connection that has seen her through some difficult times in her life. "I had mild hearing loss growing up," she explains, "and ended up rupturing both of my ear drums, causing severe hearing loss. It's rare for it not to return, but unfortunately mine didn't." Today Sophie wears a pair of sophisticated hearing aids, but over ten years ago she had to cope with the loss of a critical sense while studying for her exams. She rewarded herself for her perseverance with a copy of *Harvest Moon* on the Game Boy, a franchise she has adored since. "They turn everyday life into a fun and exciting adventure," she smiles when recalling the series, "and the games teach us about caring for nature and establishing and maintaining friendships. And it also gives some really great tips on love."

While the Game Boy was Sophie's first games machine, and her first game for it *Kid Icarus: Of Myths And Monsters* ('The music is amazing and the gameplay crazy fun'), the Nintendo 64 remains her favourite console of all time. "It brought the Nintendo characters we grew up with in 2D into 3D, showing us new ways to explore worlds we didn't know were possible. I remember thinking, 'Wow this looks *so* real!' and being unable to believe everything was in three dimensions. Looking at them today, everything looks kind of blocky and blurry!" Sophie lists a solid bunch of favourites for the 64-bit console, including *Ocarina Of Time*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Mario Kart 64*. "It brought multiplayer to the next level and created the stepping stones for many of the Nintendo games we have today." she adds.

Sophie's tale proves that the history behind the games, and the reason for collecting, can be a powerful one, and help generate a much more personal collection. And of course, as always, it's about simply collecting, playing, and enjoying, great videogames. *



**THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST**
"I got it from a flea market about an hour's drive from me – but this made it well worth it! It includes the official guide, which has the backstory and beautiful artwork."
**PAID: $50**

**SUPER MARIO BROS TELEPHONE**
"I got this from a Salvation Army thrift store while dropping off donations. It's a great find, and people always comment on it when they see it."
**PAID: $10**

**HARVEST MOON 64**
"I bought this at the grand opening of a local game store in my city. It seemed expensive at the time, but seeing as it's one of my favourites, I just had to have it."
**PAID: $100**

## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

**HARVEST MOON, GAME BOY**
"After losing my hearing, I was back at school trying to complete my studies, which was unbelievably challenging. The day I completed my final practical exam, I went to the local retro shop and bought this game as a reward to myself for not giving up. It may not be the most valuable, but it's the most treasured."
**PAID: $100**



**GAME BOY MICRO FAMICOM EDITION**
"I got it from a local seller after hunting for a long time. I don't use it that often because I'm afraid of damaging it!"
**PAID: $150**

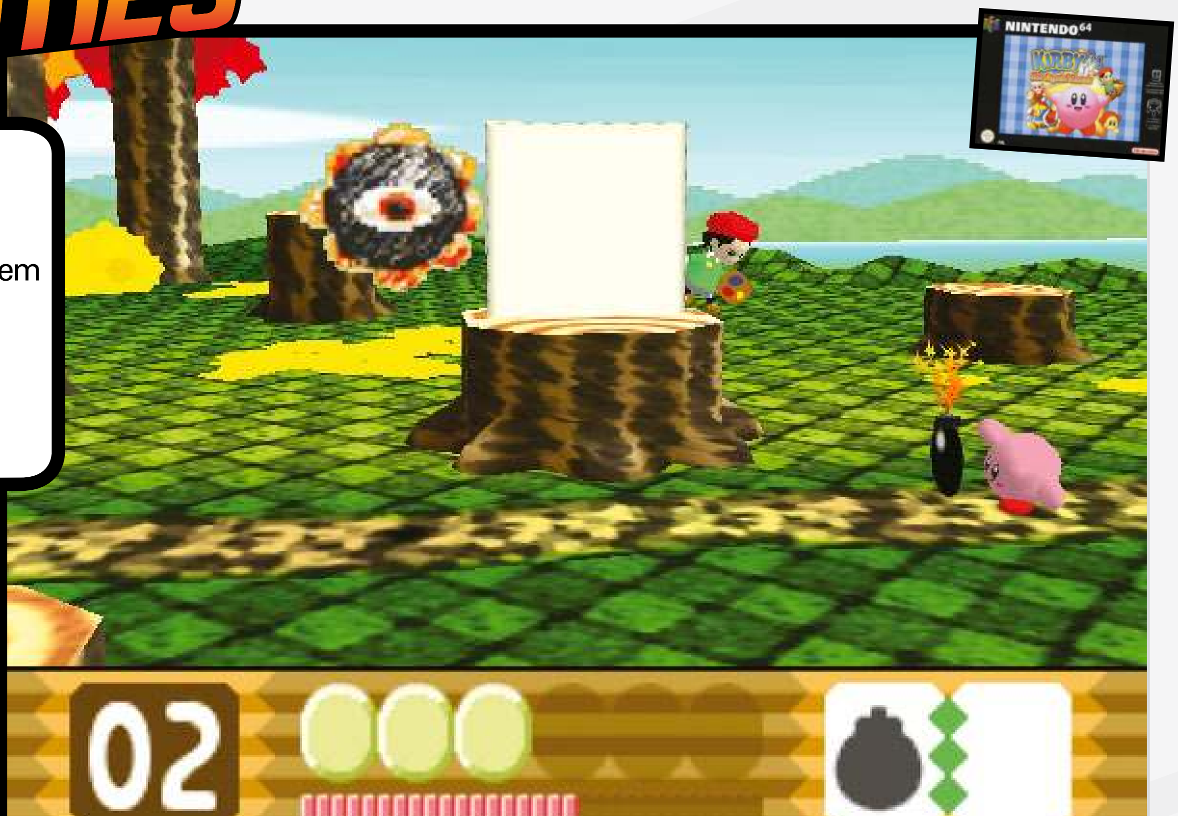



**HARVEST MOON 15TH ANNIVERSARY ART COLLECTION**
"I love to paint and draw and wanted this book as a reference for characters and scenes from the series. I love looking back through it, although it's all in Japanese so I have no idea what it says!"
**PAID: $30**

# BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

**JUNE 2000 –** With a news drought ahead of E3, players had to rely on June's releases to keep them amused. Would this bold plan work? Maybe, if you didn't own a PlayStation. Join Nick Thorpe to find out why…






[N64] It's lovely to look at, but *Kirby 64* is easily one of gaming's biggest pushovers.

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 2000

**With the Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 already trading haymakers and Microsoft's Xbox lacing up its gloves in the locker room, the world was waiting on Nintendo for news of its enigmatic Dolphin console.** Of course, Nintendo is never a company to play by anyone else's rules and was quite happy to focus on the N64, so it simply published Rare's incredible first-person shooter *Perfect Dark* and blew away the critics. Joanna Dark's debut saw her taking on dataDyne, a corporation which is in league with a shady race of aliens. Acclaim was universal – *CVG* and *Arcade* both gave it the full monty at 5/5, with the latter saying that it was "the first must-have game of the millennium." *N64 Magazine* settled for 96%, claiming that it "makes *Turok: Rage Wars* look amateurish", and even the notoriously stingy *Edge* gave it 9/10, opining that, "If you don't already possess Nintendo's console, then you really no longer have an excuse not to." The only downside was that *Perfect Dark* required the N64's Expansion Pak – without it, players would have access to a tiny portion of the game.

Faring somewhat less well, *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards* got a mauling at the hands of *Arcade* – Rich Pelley's one-star review suggested that, "For anyone over the age of eight, relearning your times tables would probably be more interesting." The main issue with the game, which utilised 3D visuals and 2D level design, was its incredibly low difficulty level. *Edge* was kinder, offering 5/10 but noting "Younger players attracted to this title may well have already honed their skills with more testing games, and mature gamers will have no problem finishing the game in one sitting." *N64 Magazine* gave the game 72%, despite complaining of "eye-glazingly bland levels" and calling it "hugely disappointing". *Mario Party 2*, a sequel to the successful party game, was rather more warmly received – scores of 87% from *N64 Magazine* and 4/5 from *CVG* are clear proof of that.

Still, *Kirby 64* must have made PlayStation owners green with envy – the summer drought had truly begun for players on Sony's machine. Just one of the 11 games reviewed in *Arcade* scored more than 2/5, and that was *Big Ol' Bass: Fisherman's Bait 2*, hardly the most mass-market of offerings. The PlayStation 2 was faring no better as Squaresoft's *Driving Emotion Type S* failed to excite the critics. "It's sluggish, it looks silly and the controls will have you sobbing," *Arcade* declared in a one-star review. *Edge*'s 4/10 review noted that the game had "one of the most obnoxious handling models in recent history."

Over on the Dreamcast, the big catch of the month was the incredibly



[PS2] *Edge* wasn't wrong, this game is harder to handle than a freshly-cooked cactus.

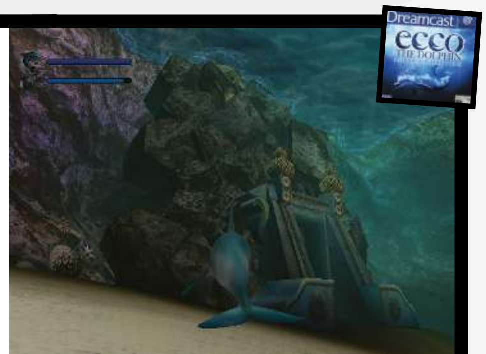
## NEWS JUNE 2000

**Two TV shows shocked British audiences this month.** On 4 June long-running soap *Coronation Street* had 13-year-old character Sarah Platt gave birth to a daughter, causing a media frenzy surrounding teenage pregnancy. Two days later, Channel 5 gave us the game show *Naked Jungle*, in which presenter Keith Chegwin and contestants completed puzzles in a jungle (while wearing no clothes, to our collective horror).

On 21 June, the Scottish Parliament passed the Ethical Standards in Public Life (etc) Act 2000, a piece of legislation most notable for its local repeal of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. Section 28 forbade local authorities to "intentionally promote homosexuality", as well the teaching of "the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" in schools, and was criticised by gay rights activists as discriminatory. Though the concept of repealing Section 28 was controversial at the time, with the House of Commons failing to repeal the bill nationally earlier in the year due to opposition in the House of Lords, the Scottish Parliament passed its bill with a 99 to 17 majority and only two abstentions. The rest of the UK would follow three years later, with the passing of the Local Government Act 2003.




[N64] Perfect just about summed it up – Rare's latest first-person shooter was as good as they got.




[Dreamcast] *Ecco* sure looks lovely, but playing the game can be a frustrating experience.

beautiful, but eternally divisive, *Ecco The Dolphin*, back on our screens after a five-year hiatus. "The detail on the coral is as beautiful as the real thing, one of the most stunning displays ever seen in a videogame," noted *Arcade*'s review. "The efforts of its animation team are impossible not to applaud," agreed *Edge*. However, players were often left with only the vaguest of hints as to what to do. "The level designers needed to lead players by the (bottle) nose. They chose not to," lamented *Edge*. "When you do manage to solve a puzzle it's more likely to be by fluke than by skill," *Arcade* remarked. *Edge* offered a 7/10 score, whereas *Arcade* gave it just 2/5.

Quietly, PC owners were having a pretty good month, due in large part to the introduction of *Shogun: Total War*. This strategy game from The Creative Assembly set the action in feudal Japan, and was the first release in what was to become the developer's defining series. "Troops react like real soldiers – they get tired, their morale can change and they can even get scared and run away when faced with a dangerous situation," noted *Arcade*, which gave *Shogun* the top score of 5/5 and its PC Game Of The Month award. "It has successfully managed to realise and blend several ideas tried to no avail in other titles, and has come up with a possible prototype for the future of the genre," *Edge* enthused, awarding the game 8/10 while cautioning that it was "no title for the *Command & Conquer* dilettante".

Game Boy Color owners were serviced with more pocket-sized versions of PlayStation hits this month. *Rayman* was an obvious choice for the conversion process, as the platforming action was well-suited to the modest 8-bit platform. More surprising was *Driver*, an excellent top-down version of the car chase game that had excited players on the more powerful platforms. The weighty feel of the Seventies muscle cars was just right, and the large maps were a joy to play on. Meanwhile, SNK served up the all-female brawler *Gals Fighters* and puzzler *Magical Drop Pocket* for the Neo-Geo Pocket Color, but also a rare misstep in the dull submarine strategy game *Dive Alert*.

So ends a relatively quiet month, then. However, just around the corner we've got the delights of E3, which promises all manner of exciting developments. Until next month, time travellers! *

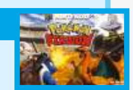



[PC] Simulating massive battles with dinky sprites was fashionable again, thanks to *Shogun*.

# CHARTS

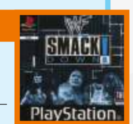
## JUNE 2000

### NINTENDO 64



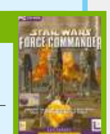
1. Pokémon Stadium (Nintendo)
2. The New Tetris (Nintendo)
3. Star Wars Episode I: Racer (LucasArts)
4. F-Zero X (Nintendo)
5. Star Wars: Rogue Squadron (LucasArts)

### PLAYSTATION



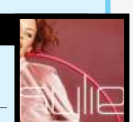
1. WWF Smackdown (THQ)
2. Syphon Filter 2 (Sony)
3. Medievil 2 (Sony)
4. F1 2000 (Electronic Arts)
5. Toy Story 2 (Activision)

### PC



1. Star Wars: Force Commander (Activision)
2. Soldier Of Fortune (Activision)
3. The Sims (Electronic Arts)
4. F1 2000 (Electronic Arts)
5. Star Trek: Armada (Activision)

### MUSIC



1. Spinning Around (Kylie Minogue)
2. You See The Trouble With Me (Black Legend)
3. Sandstorm (Darude)
4. It Feels So Good (Sonique)
5. Babylon (David Gray)

## THIS MONTH IN...



### Arcade

Jon Hare is back, having resurfaced at Codemasters after Sensible Software's abortive *Sex, Drugs & Rock 'N' Roll* lost the studio almost £2 million, killing it outright. "Running a business isn't very rewarding these days," says the developer. "I realised I couldn't do business *and* design, so I chose design."



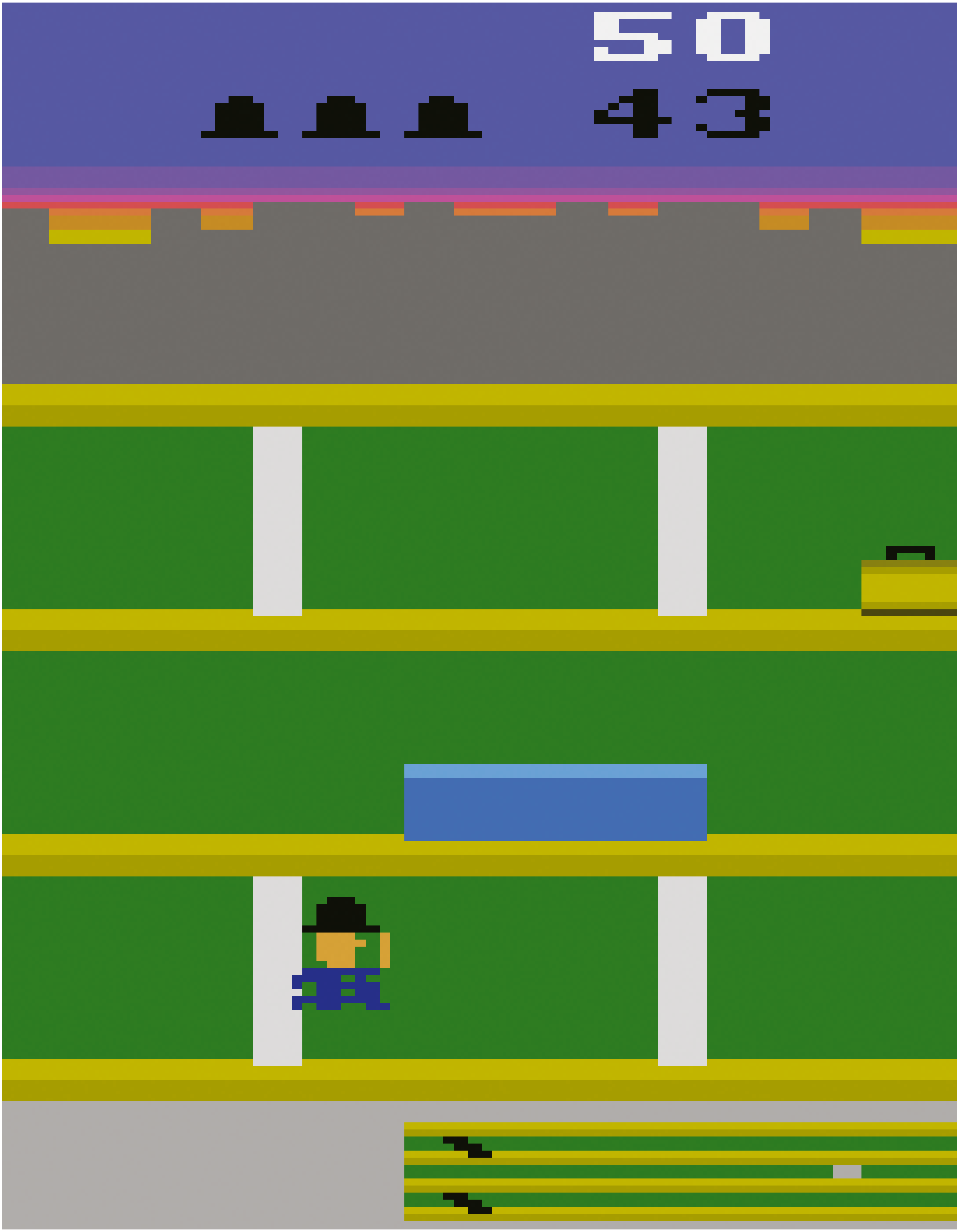
### Computer & Video Games

A guide to using online auction sites appears in the front of the magazine this month – a copy of *F1 2000* and an empty PlayStation 2 box are sold, while *Super Mario All-Stars* and Virtual Boy *Wario Land* are bought. Seems like a cool novelty, but we can't really see this whole 'eBay' thing catching on…



### N64

Taking umbrage with the abuse of science in N64 games, the Breaking The Laws feature features a number of baffling questions in mock GCSE exam format, such as, "List three common herbs which, when digested, heal all external and internal wounds," and, "Exactly why can't the secret agent jump?"


50
43

# Keystone Kapers

ARCADE FUN ON YOUR HUMBLE ATARI

» RETROREVIVAL



» **ATARI 2600** » **1983** » **ACTIVISION**

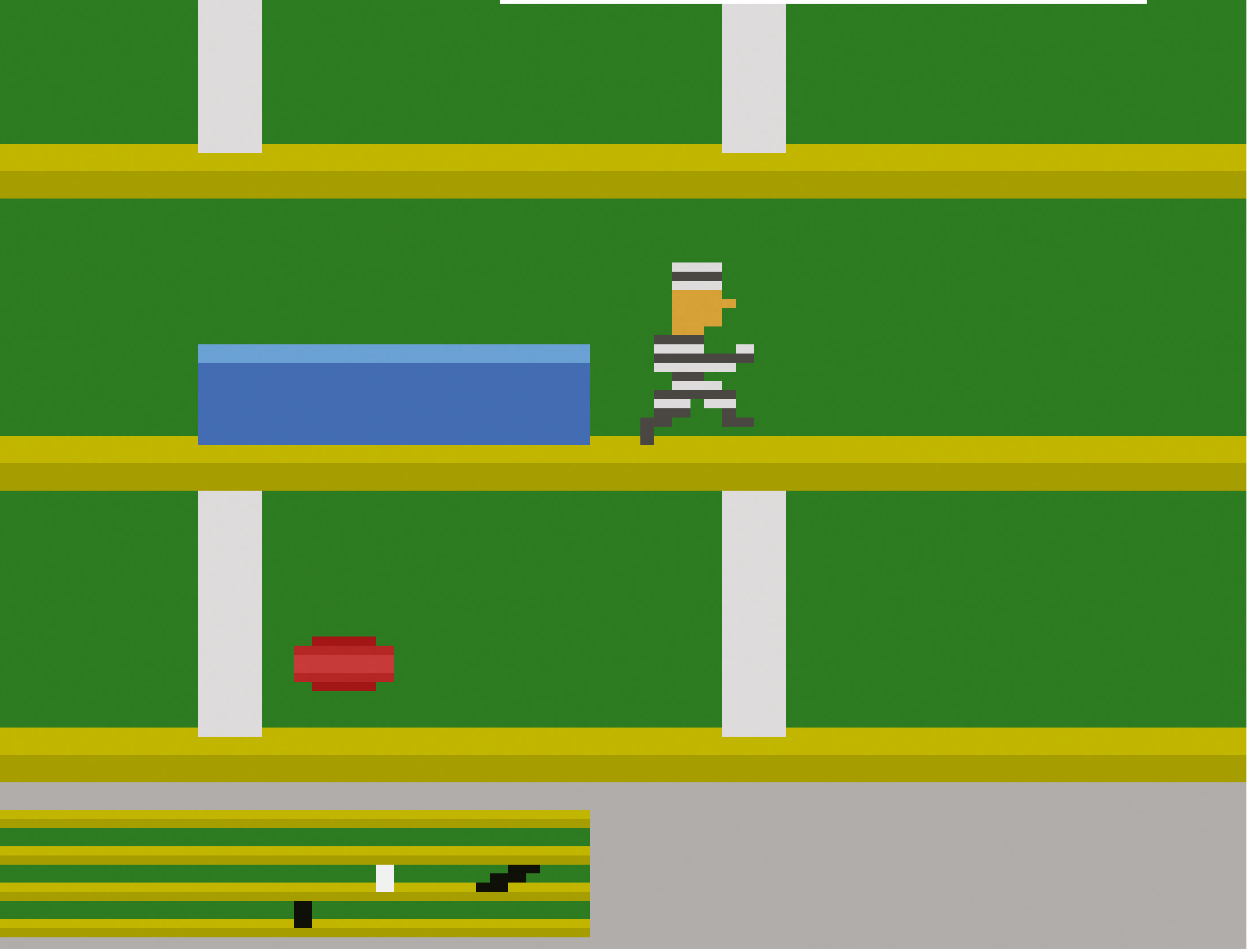
Activision seemed untouchable during the early Eighties. Formed by a bunch of talented, and disgruntled, Atari employees, it started off creating games for the Atari 2600 before moving across to other formats.

Activision was one of the first companies I actively recognised as a youngster and one of the first to aggressively promote its coders – it was lack of recognition for developers at Atari that led to the company being formed in the first place – and their grinning faces could be found in the instruction book of each game. But, then, the likes of David Crane, Bob Whitehead and Larry Kaplan had plenty to smile about because the output of their games was generally considered to be of an incredibly high standard.

Take *Keystone Kapers,* for example. Like the best arcade games of the time it had a simple concept at its core: catch a robber as quickly as possible, but it also boasted that important replay value that always had me returning for one more go. I love fast-paced action games, particularly shoot-'em-ups and many of Activision's releases scratched a very important itch for me.

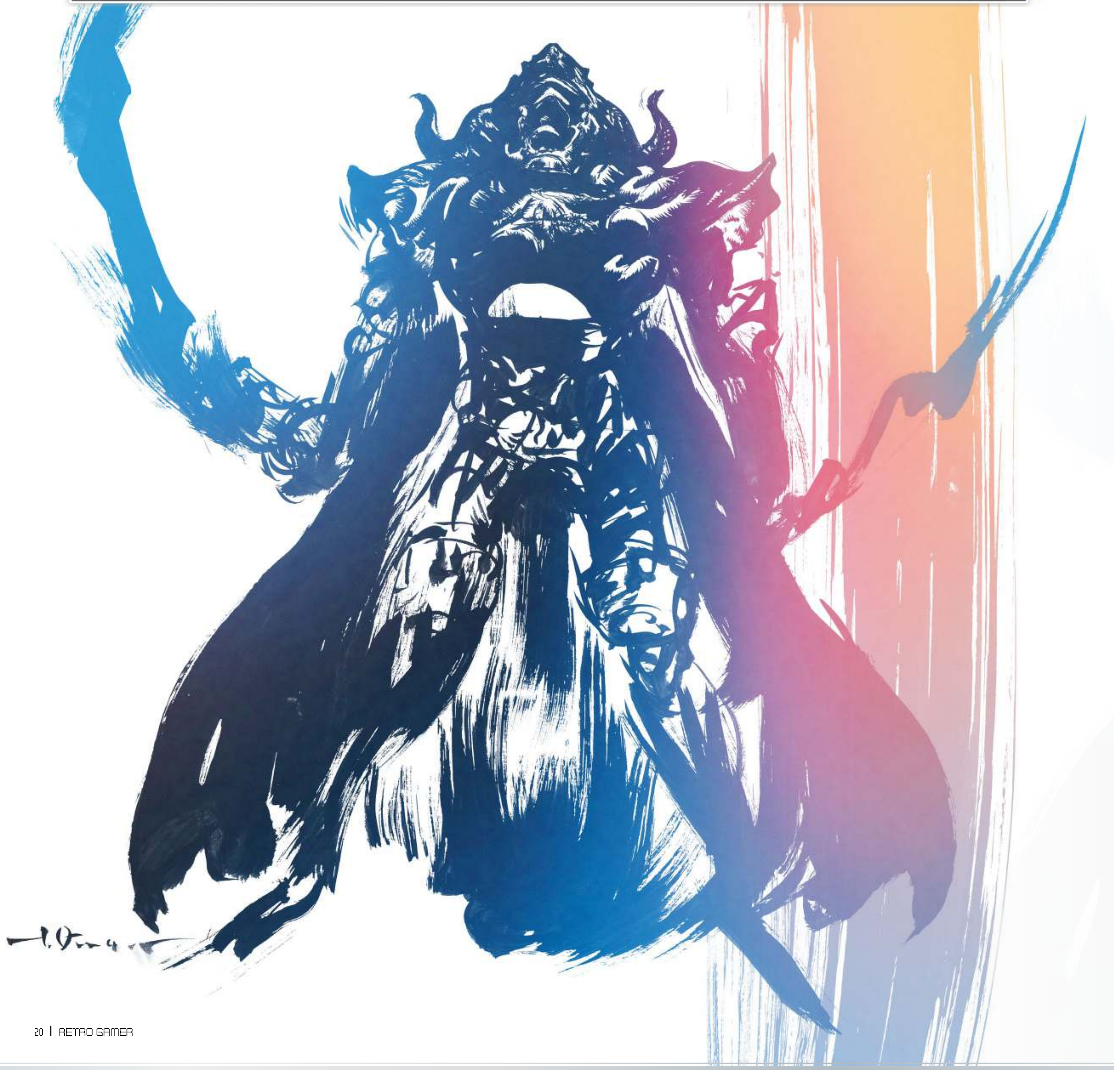
I personally first encountered Garry Kitchen's game during the mid-Eighties and was instantly grabbed by how slick and polished it was. The playable police officer and the robber he was pursuing were not only well animated, but also moved at a tremendous rate, easily matching the speed and fluidity of the popular arcade games at the time. Having the levels split into several sections meant you'd need to use the in-game minimap to best plan your route to your wily foe, while a stream of incoming projectiles and point-based items to pick up ensure your reactions were always being tested.

I absolutely used to adore playing *Keystone Kapers* back in the day, and returning to it now for the purpose of this Retro Revival proves that Garry's enjoyable game has lost none of its appeal. In fact, it would probably make for a pretty interesting making of, don't you think? *



THE MAKING OF

# FINAL FANTASY® XII






» [PS2] You spend an extortionate amount of time in the city of Rabanastre at the beginning of *Final Fantasy XII.*

# YEARS IN THE MAKING, THIS PS2 GAME WAS A TOTAL REINVENTION OF THE RPG SERIES. NOW, AS IT RETURNS TO MODERN CONSOLES IN HD, SAMUEL ROBERTS SPEAKS TO SQUARE ENIX ABOUT CREATING THIS DARING CLASSIC

***Final Fantasy* is well known for throwing out its characters and worlds between entries and starting again.** To an outsider, it might look like they're just swapping one set of melodramatic, spiky-haired and buckle-clad teenagers for another, but this is far from the only thing that changes in this RPG series. From 1988's *Final Fantasy II* onwards, Squaresoft would reinvent the underlying systems of the combat and character progression in every sequel. Yet it would still retain a very traditional turn-based battle system right up until *Final Fantasy X* on PS2 – a predictable sequence of random encounters, an iconic victory theme and some form of levelling up. For a long time, all of this seemed resistant to change.




» [PS2] Vaan and Penelo are your typical 'fish-out-of-water' protagonists.

*Final Fantasy XII* was the bravest game released in the series. It jettisoned turn-based combat for a real-time system that had no random encounters. Enemies were instead spread across sprawling fields, and the transition between combat and exploration was seamless. Using a smart new system called Gambits, you could program your characters to automatically execute perfect party strategies, telling them exactly when to attack, heal or cast a spell. Even by the standards of a series built on reinventing itself, it was radical.

*FFXII* came from the lineage of the PSone's *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Vagrant Story*, sharing their setting of Ivalice, as well as their character designer (Akihiko Yoshida) and game director (Yasumi Matsuno). Several years into a long, five-year-plus development cycle, Matsuno dropped out of *FFXII* reportedly due to health concerns. While much of the story surrounding *Final Fantasy XII*'s creation became about Matsuno's departure, he was joined as codirector of the project by long-time *Final Fantasy* battle design mastermind Hiroyuki Ito. This meant the vision of the game didn't change too much when Matsuno left.

"We had many experienced development staff in the team, such as Hiroyuki Ito, who was in charge of many of the battle designs for previous numbered *Final Fantasy* titles, and had a clear vision of what we had to do up to the game's launch, so the development of the game or the overall vision was not really affected," says *FFXII*'s project manager, Hiroaki Kato.



» [PS2] Random encounters were done away with for *Final Fantasy XII.* Instead, enemies patrolled the world.

It's previously been reported that after Matsuno departed the project, the development team was restructured, but Kato denies this was the case. The project was extensively delayed from a targeted summer 2004 release date, eventually reaching Japan in May 2006 – but this was due to the ambition behind the project rather than his leaving. "That reorganisation of the development team did not actually happen, so no differences in the process arose from this," Kato says. "The biggest challenge in *Final* ▶

▶ *Fantasy XII* was transitioning from the menu-based battle system separated from the exploration in previous *Final Fantasy* titles, to seamless, real-time battles using the Gambit system. We also added in a great many more elements for replay value, such as the bounty hunts, so we needed to adjust and balance out the game itself and the battle system, and that is what we needed the time for."

The Gambit system lets players choose their abilities, and when to execute them. You can set your characters to automatically attack enemies on less than 50 per cent health, for example, or to heal allies who are on less than 30 per cent health – then you can prioritise these commands to achieve the best results. The fighting plays out automatically, but you can also manually select moves if needed. The Gambits start as simply as characters attacking the enemies who are nearest to them, though it's later made complicated by many more abilities, customisable conditions and additional Gambit slots. It's very basic programming, but it's also more complex than anything *Final Fantasy* had challenged players with before at that time.

**"Depending on the player, with their individual tastes and preferences, some of them may feel *Final Fantasy XII*'s game system is too complicated," Kato says.** "However, from a development point of view, rather than seeing it as complicated, we feel that these different opinions come from how well different players can get used to the new systems that have been implemented," he continues. "When you look at current-generation games, there are many games released with an open-world setting and real-time battles, where the character development is deep and players can really enjoy the exploration. I feel that the players have gotten used to playing these kind of games, so from that perspective I don't think *Final Fantasy XII* is a complicated game. I recognise *Final Fantasy XII* as a game that has depth and that lets players enjoy many playing styles."




» [PS2] *FFXII*'s visual style still looks great today, a fantastic mix of sci-fi and traditional fantasy.

**"I RECOGNISE FFXII AS A GAME THAT HAS DEPTH AND THAT LETS PLAYERS ENJOY MANY PLAYING STYLES"**

Hiroaki Kato

He's not wrong – that flexibility and strategy is why *Final Fantasy XII* is so exciting. The Gambit system is coupled to the License Board, which lets players unlock the new abilities they acquire throughout the world, as well as powerful attacks and summons. It is a little trickier to grasp than something like, say, *Final Fantasy X*, where all that's required to use an ability is to unlock it, then select it in battle. But the nature of Gambits means the player gets the pleasure of building a sequence of intricate strategies, then watching them play out. There's far more tactical scope to it than mainline *Final Fantasy* typically offers.

With no random battles, the continuous cycle of fighting and exploring offers a very different pace to previous games, where battles are famously heightened with dramatic music and punctuated with the aforementioned victory theme. This only plays infrequently in *Final Fantasy XII*. You can chain combos of enemies to obtain better loot, and take part in bounty hunts for specific monsters. What this seamless design does is create a more tangible world, and the




» [PS2] The transition from freely wandering around into battles is seamless.



## PENELO

■ Vaan's childhood friend and marginally more interesting than him, she gets dragged into the war as well. Penelo dreams of becoming a dancer, and her Quickening attacks – *FFXII*'s equivalent of Limit Breaks – reflect that.

## VAAN

■ *FFXII*'s de facto main character, although he's a real bore. Vaan lives on the streets of Rabanastre, and gets pulled into the battle against the Archadian Empire, the war having claimed the life of his brother, Reks.






» [PS2] The world of Ivalice is large – so large, in fact, that it has its own universe of games.



sense of a functioning ecosystem between its wildlife.

"*Final Fantasy XII* was a title where we committed to really building up the world of Ivalice," Kato says. "While we were setting out the climate, cultures, races and the state of affairs of Ivalice, it seemed that implementing the ecosystem of the monsters was the next natural step. The fact that many players who have just started playing *Final Fantasy XII* will accidently attack the Wild Saurian in the Dalmasca Estersand (it's a high-level monster that is not hostile towards the player) and get defeated, leading to [a] game over, is kind of amusing." Most players will probably remember that giant patrolling dinosaur from the game's opening hours – it's intimidating to look at, but by leaving you alone, it's the world's way of telling you that not everything in *FFXII* is out to kill you.

**While Ivalice is divided into too many truncated land-masses to feel truly open-world in the way that something like *Skyrim* does now, it's leagues ahead of the small pockets of towns and pared-down world maps seen in previous *Final Fantasy* games.** The architecture of towns in *FFXII* is dense, and shops are filled with objects. Ivalice is portrayed in a complete-feeling way.

This setting had previously appeared in several other games created by Matsuno, but this was our most comprehensive look at Ivalice yet. "At its core, *Final Fantasy Tactics* had a 'miniature garden'-like field where the 2D characters battled in a turn-based system, while *Final Fantasy XII* was reproducing Ivalice's environments in 360 degrees with real-time movement and battle progression. So you could say it is only natural that *Final Fantasy XII* required a greater density of information in the art." Being fully 3D makes a huge difference, and more in line with the RPGs we're used to today – you could spin the camera around and enjoy the detail of the world for the first time. It's helped the game age incredibly well.

*FFXII*'s combat and exploration offsets some of the game's weaknesses, like its thoroughly boring protagonist, Vaan, and an overplayed, dry story of a resistance group ousting an occupying evil empire. Your hero is overshadowed by the cast that surrounds him – including rightful heir to the Dalmascan throne, Ashe, and Han Solo-esque sky pirate Balthier. ▶

### ASHE

■ The heir to the kingdom of Dalmasca, Ashe operates undercover after her husband, Rasler, is murdered, and her kingdom is overthrown by the Archadian empire. Her journey is about taking the land back.



» [PS2] The License Board was thrown away for a proper Job system in *FFXII*'s rereleases.



» [PS2] Balthier and Fran remind us of Han and Chewie… only they've been kicked through JRPG Design 101.

## THE IVALICE ALLIANCE

**The games that share Final Fantasy XII's world**

### FINAL FANTASY TACTICS



■ This PSone tactical RPG was the first game set in Ivalice, as envisioned by Yasumi Matsuno, although here it's represented by some simple isometric backgrounds. The original *Tactics* features a deep job system, as well as a cameo from *FFVII*'s Cloud. It was later rereleased as *Final Fantasy Tactics: War Of The Lions* on PSP.

### VAGRANT STORY



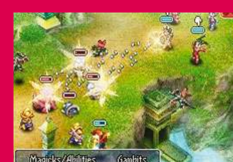
■ A true cult classic, *Vagrant Story* is an RPG with puzzle elements thrown in, too, as well as specific targeting of enemy body parts, giving it a bit of a dungeon crawler feel. It's a more complicated game than *FFXII*, but no less beloved. *Vagrant Story*'s character designs are unmistakably the work of Akihiko Yoshida as well.

### FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE



■ A cutesy-looking (but no less hardcore) tactical RPG from Square, *FF Tactics Advance* is instead set in an Ivalice imagined by children, though many of the same elements recur, like its species and rule-enforcing Judges. Some **Retro Gamer** trivia about *FF Tactics Advance*: editor Darran Jones played this for hundreds of hours on GBA while lying down after injuring his back in the early Noughties.

### FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS



■ The second time *Final Fantasy* has received a direct sequel, after *FFX-2*, *Revenant Wings* is set after *XII* but looks and feels very different. This isometric RPG works in real time, like its predecessor, but requires more direct input from the player, so can get slightly busy on the DS's tiny screen. It'd be a better fit for tablets or PC.

### FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2: GRIMOIRE OF THE RIFT



■ As part of the *Ivalice Alliance* sequence of games, the setting was revisited yet again in this sequel to the GBA game, which retains its in-depth job system and tactical combat but with a few tweaks. This was the last *FF Tactics* game. It's long overdue a revival at this point.

### CRYSTAL DEFENDERS



■ This tower defence/RPG fusion came out near the end of the Noughties, at the height of the TD genre's popularity, and was released on every console from the previous generation, as well as smartphones. It's no one's favourite *FF* spin-off, though, and other games in this list offer far more comrehensive visions of Ivalice.

### FINAL FANTASY XIV: STORMBLOOD



■ Technically not set in Ivalice, this well-loved MMO's recent expansion will feature a 24-person raid called Return to Ivalice, which will explore that world once with creative oversight from Yasumi Matsuno. *FFXIV* has built up a reputation as a great fan-service MMO – this can only add to that.



## BALTHIER

■ What if Han Solo was British, and he flew a sweet airship instead of the Millennium Falcon? This is the question asked by the existence of sky pirate Balthier, who's clearly the most entertaining and well-drawn character out of *XII*'s fairly dry cast.

## FRAN

■ And what if Chewbacca was an absurdly dressed bunny lady? Fran is Balthier's partner on the Strahl. She's a Viera, a kind of Amazonian rabbit-eared species, though she's considered an outcast by her people now.

▶ There's also the memorably weary wanted man Basch, alongside Vaan's slightly-less-dull-friend Penelo. Balthier's partner, the rabbit-like member of the Viera species, the ludicrously dressed Fran, helps make Ivalice feel like a varied backdrop with a deep, pre-existing lore.

**All of this is lifted by a localisation job that's significantly better than that seen in *Final Fantasy X*.** The drama is professionally constructed, one-liners land well and the cast is memorably varied in nationality. It doesn't sound like bad anime, basically, and that makes a huge difference. "I think *Final Fantasy X*'s voice acting was good as well," says Kato when we point out criticism of the game. "The reason *Final Fantasy XII* got great reviews was because we learned from our experiences of doing the voice acting on *Final Fantasy X*. I mean, *Final Fantasy X* was the first ever numbered *Final Fantasy* title that implemented voice acting! We had more experience in development on the PlayStation 2 hardware, so we were able to create smoother character expressions with voices, and the localisation staff that were working on this game were excellent. I think another big point was that we used different voice actors with different accents (such as American English, British English, Latin American English and Northern European English) depending on the character's origin and race, to give the game more realism."



The Viera have Icelandic accents, for example, while the decision to make the Archadian Empire British and Dalmascans American was borrowed straight from *Star Wars*, according to a *US Gamer* interview with translator Alexander O Smith and casting director Jack Fletcher. That said, the story generally has a bit of *Star Wars* feel, with its big-dreaming protagonist, and obvious analogues to Princess Leia and Han Solo in Ashe and Balthier respectively – particularly as the latter pilots a cool airship.

# BATTLE SYSTEMS

**Your guide to fighting Square's 12th fantasy**




## MAPPED FOR SUCCESS

■ This shows enemies' proximity to your characters. You can run away from opponents if you're underpowered or your Gambits are badly organised.

## THE THIN RED LINE

■ This line – blue for allies, red for enemies – indicates which character is currently being targeted by whom.

## GAMBLING ON GAMBITS

■ This 'G' symbol indicates that Gambits are currently active. Note that Balthier's are not, meaning he is being manually controlled by the player.

## PREPARE FOR ACTION

■ This indicates when a character's next action will take place, or what action is currently taking place. Waiting for this can be tense in *FFXII*.






» [PS2] Like every JRPG, many NPCs deal out superfluous dialogue.



Rather than being inspired by George Lucas' space opera, though, Kato instead suggests they were both tapping into similarly pervasive staples of popular fiction. "We weren't influenced by *Star Wars* (but personally, *Star Wars* is one of my most favourite films!). *Final Fantasy XII* has what you might call quite 'orthodox' archetypal characters and story, so we were developing it with that in mind. I think *Star Wars* was also created with an orthodox, archetypal storyline and characters, so some players may perceive that we were influenced by that. People often ask if *Star Wars* was influenced by this work or that too, but when trying to create an archetypal, orthodox story it is the same kinds of easily recognisable themes and content that will appeal to viewers or players, so they may well confuse the fact they are easy to understand with having seen them somewhere else before."

**F*inal Fantasy XII* returns in July with *The Zodiac Age*, a PS4 HD reissue that's built on the *International Job System* version only released in Japan on PlayStation 2.** It's not quite the same game as the original, with the License Board traded for a dedicated job progression system, allowing for more meaningful differences between each of the party members. In this version, you can assign two jobs to your characters for more flexibility. There's also an autosave function this time, a minimap and a high-speed mode to make those battles go by quickly, alongside other tweaks.

"WE NOT ONLY JUST MADE IT HD, WE IMPLEMENTED NEW GAMEPLAY SYSTEMS AND IMPROVED THE GAME VASTLY"
Hiroaki Kato

The goal isn't to simplify this RPG, just to give players more of a chance to understand its systems. *Final Fantasy XII* throws players in at the deep end, and clearly critics didn't mind at the time, but opening the game up to more people is no bad thing. It's hard to dispute that the main attraction of this reissue is seeing Ivalice and its characters in HD, though. It's worth remembering that *Final Fantasy XII* came out after *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* – this was one of the PS2's last big games. Like Clover Studio's *Okami*, it showed how much potential was still left in the hardware at the time.

"*Final Fantasy XII* was a title that was loved by many players, and we heard many voices from fans asking to create a high-definition version," Kato says. "We not only just made it high-definition, we implemented new gameplay systems and improved the game vastly, so I feel the players can enjoy a new playing experience in *Final Fantasy XII*. In relation to the art, we built the original game pushing the very limits of the PlayStation 2, so when looked at in hindsight from the current generation, it may well appear to have been out of its time. I feel that because we were able to create it like that, it made it perfect to convert into a high-quality, high-definition game."

Akihiko Yoshida's character designs still look fantastic today, with an almost painterly style to the 3D models, particularly around the eyes. This stops the game from dating quite as fast as some older 3D games do – the translation of the art is amazing. "I think that effect comes from how hard we worked on creating the characters to look like the original Akihiko Yoshida drawings are actually moving," Kato says. "In *Final Fantasy XII The Zodiac Age*, we have been able to improve the visual depictions that were limited by the PlayStation 2 hardware even further. I heard they had the new visuals shown to Mr Yoshida as well, and carried out the improvements based on the original art with his supervision, so I hope the fans can enjoy that."

*FFXII* marked the last time the long-running RPG series was truly ahead of the curve, and it warrants such a celebration. The series' great strength, more so than creating grand stories and iconic characters that appeal to young people, is in brilliantly designed and complex battle systems that are presented simply to the player. The developers wanted to create a new version of that in a well-realised world, and they undoubtedly succeeded. "Honestly, that intention was so strong that we don't really have a feeling that we left a legacy or anything like that," Kato says. "Personally, I really like open-world games with seamless, real-time battles, so seeing games with that kind of system being released since *Final Fantasy XII* makes me really happy." *

### BASCH

■ Blamed for the murder of the king of Dalmasca at the start of *FFXII*, Basch seeks to clear his name. Early in the game, your party breaks him out of jail, after he's wrongly declared dead by the occupying Archadian forces.




» [PS4] If you missed out of *FFXII*, a remaster entitled *The Zodiac Age* is on its way this month for PS4.

# FINAL F

## 30TH ANNI



### FIRION

FINAL FANTASY II

■ Our very first named hero is the archetypical holder of the role – loyal to his family and country, with a strong desire to do what is necessary to protect them. Supposedly, he's got a bit of a weakness for women.

### ONION KNIGHT

FINAL FANTASY III

■ Better known as Luneth to those who have played *Final Fantasy III*'s remake, this chap has courage in spades but is just a bit too eager to act at times. As the first character spoken to by the crystals, he becomes his party's de facto leader.

### CECIL HARVEY

FINAL FANTASY IV

■ This brave Dark Knight is neither arrogant nor outspoken, despite his role as one of the king's elite soldiers. He's a much better fit for his role once he questions his loyalties and becomes a paladin.

### BARTZ KLAUSER

FINAL FANTASY V

■ Without much purpose other than wandering the world, Bartz is an easygoing soul whose life changes after his encounter with a crashed meteor. This multitalented hero has a notable fear of heights due to a childhood fall.

### TERRA BRANFORD

FINAL FANTASY VI

■ *Final Fantasy*'s first female protagonist is a powerful esper whose abilities are hijacked for harm by the Empire. During her quest, she struggles to regain her memories and reconcile her humanity with her magical abilities.

### CLOUD STRIFE

FINAL FANTASY VII

■ This mercenary isn't interested in much other than getting paid, until he hooks up with the environmentalist resistance group AVALANCHE and discovers that his past might not be what he thought it was.

# ANTASY

# VERSARY



### SQUALL LEONHART
**FINAL FANTASY VIII**

■ A loner at heart, Squall finds leadership thrust upon him as part of his duties in the SeeD military academy. Thanks to his rival, Seifer, he bears a rather distinctive facial scar.

### ZIDANE TRIBAL
**FINAL FANTASY IX**

■ This diminutive thief is a real ladies' man who sets out to kidnap a princess. Confident and competent the majority of the time, any insecurities that he holds are generally things that he tries to deal with himself.

### TIDUS
**FINAL FANTASY X**

■ As a Blitzball star, Tidus is athletic and upbeat to a fault, but he's got some rather severe daddy issues. He's also a pretty handy swordsman, and has a laugh that has made him famous all over the world.

### VAAN
**FINAL FANTASY XII**

■ Being the self-appointed guardian of a group of orphans, Vaan is a natural leader. A life of poverty hasn't ground him down, and he's a bit of a dreamer, constantly thinking of the day he'll own an airship.

### LIGHTNING
**FINAL FANTASY XIII**

■ This determined, fierce hero is bound up in a quest to save her sister, Serah. She's a rollercoaster of emotions, too – initially cold and distant, she opens up in the second game of the *Final Fantasy XIII* trilogy only to lose her emotions again.

### NOCTIS LUCIS CAELUM
**FINAL FANTASY XV**

■ Heir to the kingdom of Lucis, Noctis is the son of King Regis, and has to deal with the aftermath of a coup. He's aloof and prickly, but his heart is in the right place. He's supported and constantly propped-up by his three good friends.



# FANTASY ON FILM

## There's more to Final Fantasy than videogames – check out these excursions into the world of cinema

**With *Final Fantasy* games offering more plot depth than the typical videogame, particularly during the early years of the series' history, there's some sense to adapting them to film – but straight adaptations have actually been few and far between.**

*Final Fantasy*'s first foray into the movie market came with the 1994 release of *Final Fantasy: Legend Of The Crystals*, a four-part anime video series that followed the events of *Final Fantasy V*, albeit 200 years in the future with mostly new characters. This one's not very easy to find anymore – the only English language release was a North American VHS run back in the late Nineties. An even more tenuous connection is found in the anime series *Final Fantasy Unlimited*, a 2001 series that borrows some elements, such as Moogles, without relating to any particular game.



*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* wasn't based on a game, and was far more ambitious. Directed by Hironobu Sakaguchi and released by in-house group Square Pictures, the tale of a future Earth ravaged by aliens was one of the first films to attempt photorealistic CGI depiction of humans. Despite impressive scenes and an A-list voice cast, it only made $85 million at the box office in 2001 – not nearly enough to recoup the film's production budget of $137 million.

A more modest CGI effort followed in the form of *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, a direct follow-up to the videogame that arrived in 2005. Released straight to DVD, this features many of the characters from the original in a world now ravaged by the mysterious Geostigma. This was a big seller, leading to a special extended Blu-Ray edition in 2010. In 2016, another CGI movie titled *Kingsglaive: Final Fantasy XV* and a free anime series titled *Brotherhood: Final Fantasy XV* served to expand the universe of the new game.

# WITH OVER 100 MILLION GAMES SOLD, FINAL FANTASY IS A PILLAR OF THE JAPANESE RPG SCENE. NICK THORPE LOOKS BACK OVER THREE DECADES OF THE ICONIC SERIES WITH SHINJI HASHIMOTO

**There are few series of games that are unavoidably big, but *Final Fantasy* is definitely one of them.** Even if you've somehow missed all of the main entries in the series, there are the spinoffs, the cameos, and even films to talk about. With over 100 million games sold, discussing Japanese RPGs without including *Final Fantasy* is like excluding *Mario* from a conversation about platform games, or ignoring *Street Fighter* in a chat about fighting games.

In 1987, Squaresoft was anything but unavoidably big. It was struggling to make headway as a publisher on Nintendo's market-conquering Famicom, during a time when the platform was at its most lucrative. With little money, the company was in a jam – but then, so was game designer Hironobu Sakaguchi. His previous games hadn't hit major commercial success, and he was contemplating leaving the games industry to return to university. He had wanted to create a role-playing game, and met resistance from management. External events would break down barriers for Sakaguchi, as the success of Enix's Famicom RPG *Dragon Quest* proved that the market for a console RPG existed.

Even then, putting the game together was no simple task. Sakaguchi has confided that his internal reputation hampered his initial attempts to form a team for the '*Fighting Fantasy*' project – he was considered a rough boss, and as his games struggled to sell, staff opted for other teams. Just three people joined his team initially, and he had to put out feelers before gaining key members of




» [NES] The Warriors Of Light do battle against a sparse backdrop in the very first *Final Fantasy*.

> "FINAL FANTASY DOES NOT SIMPLY TRY TO EMULATE AND BUILD ON THE PREVIOUS TITLES IN THE SERIES"
> SHINJI HASHIMOTO

the team, such as game designers Koichi Ishii and Akitoshi Kawazu. Programming was handled by new hire Nasir Gebelli, who had taken the Apple II scene by storm with his action games. Yoshitaka Amano, who provided character designs, had been a freelancer before joining Square for *Final Fantasy*; Sakaguchi has said that he had dismissed Ishii's suggestion to use Amano due to failing to recognise the name, only to be told that the magazine clippings he'd been using for inspiration were Amano's work.

When the resulting game finally made it to market in December 1987, it was known as *Final Fantasy* – a name change necessitated by the existence of the *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks, with the word 'Final' chosen due to the precarious position of both Sakaguchi and Squaresoft. However, the market was ready for a new RPG, and *Final Fantasy* had key advantages over the likes of *Dragon Quest*, particularly when it came to its more elaborately told plot, which involved the Warriors Of Light banding together to battle the evil knight Garland. Instead of playing as a single hero, *Final Fantasy* allowed the player to form a four-character party from six character classes with unique attributes and abilities – Warrior, Thief, Monk, Black Mage, White Mage and Red Mage. The game was a swift success, selling 400,000 copies on the Famicom, paving the way for an MSX2 conversion in 1989 and an English translation for the NES in 1990.

When the time came for a sequel, Squaresoft took some unusual steps that would come to be recognised as part of the *Final Fantasy* design philosophy.




» [Famicom] Work started on a translation of *Final Fantasy II*, but was abandoned due to concerns over release timing.




» [Famicom] *Final Fantasy III* holds the record for longest time between release and English translation, at 16 years.

» [SNES] Mid-battle dialogue can turn what seems to be a hostile encounter into a gut-wrenching moment.







"*Final Fantasy* does not simply try to emulate and build on the previous titles in the series, but to exceed and reach beyond them with every possible effort, so in that sense developing each and every game in the series is a very big challenge in itself," explains Shinji Hashimoto, *Final Fantasy* brand manager at Square Enix. The first major change was that the game did away with the experience points system from the original (and many other RPGs). Instead, characters developed their attributes through practical use – a character could increase its magic statistic by casting many spells, for example.

**The more radical change was the decision to omit all of the characters and settings from the original game, in favour of a new setting in which the characters were named and had defined histories.** This followed Firion and his party, who find themselves attacked by the forces of Palamecia. This decision would set a precedent for the series – each subsequent game would also start afresh, leading to a series of disconnected stories bound together by an evolving role-playing game design. This would turn out to be one of the series' greatest strengths, as the designers have had the freedom to adapt to changing market trends with their characters and settings.

This disconnect between the games has also given rise to an interesting phenomenon – while most other series of games include their fan favourites and black sheep, *Final Fantasy* fans are



» [Famicom] Your entire party starts off as Onion Knights in *Final Fantasy III*, but can soon change jobs.

incredibly passionate about their particular favourites within the series. In fact, this is something that Hashimoto agrees with. When asked about the series' key rivals, he responds: "I think it is very difficult to compare *Final Fantasy* to other games. If I had to give one then I would say that the other numbered *Final Fantasy* games are all each other's rivals!"

*Final Fantasy II* was an even bigger hit than its predecessor in Japan, shifting 800,000 copies following its December 1988 release. Unfortunately, *Final Fantasy II* didn't make it to the West. Though Square Enix had started work on a translation following the success of the original game, the late start ultimately doomed it. Progress was slow, the game was ageing, and the SNES was on the horizon, so it was ultimately scrapped. Western players would finally get to play it as part of the PlayStation compilation *Final Fantasy Origins* in 2003.

The same fate befell the next game, *Final Fantasy III*. This game centred on four orphans who are tasked with restoring balance to the world, which they seek to do by defeating Xande, ▶




» [SNES] Bartz and Lenna find an old man passed out by the meteor impact site.

▶ a warlock whose goal is to gain crystals of light and unleash chaos upon the world. Unusually, each of your characters in *Final Fantasy III* begins the game as an Onion Knight, but can switch jobs freely during the course of the game, allowing a wide range of character and class combinations.

Despite a disruption caused by the expiration of Nasir Gebelli's work visa, which forced the team to relocate to the USA to finish the game, *Final Fantasy III* was the most advanced game in the series so far, shipping on a four megabit cartridge when it released in April 1990. The series was still growing, with 500,000 copies sold in the first week and 1.4 million copies sold in total. Despite being one of the most popular entries in the series among Japanese fans, remake projects faltered until a full 3D Nintendo DS remake in 2006, which opened the game to Western players a mere 16 years after its initial release.

Another crucial part of the *Final Fantasy* identity is the constant push for bigger and better technology. "We have always tried to be at the cutting edge of gaming in each era, going from 2D pixel sprites to 3D, and from prerendering to real-time," explains Hashimoto. "The media our games are on has also followed the trends in hardware, going from ROM cassettes through CD-ROM to DVD-ROM, Blu-ray and even branching into smartphones." This drive would define *Final Fantasy IV*, which became the first entry in the series to debut on the SNES.




» [SNES] The US SNES version of *Final Fantasy VI* was the last to use Western numbering – everyone synchronised at *VII*.

***Final Fantasy IV* featured characters with fixed classes, and centres around Cecil Harvey, who begins the game as a member of the Kingdom of Baron's elite Red Wings air force unit.** The battle system in this game received an overhaul, with turn-based combat giving way to a system that Square termed 'Active Time Battle' – menu-driven combat taking place in real time, with enemies capable of launching attacks even as you decide on your next move. This exciting system would carry forward to many of Square's other RPGs, including *Final Fantasy* games. Technologically, the game took advantage of the enhanced colour palette of the SNES, and used Mode 7 effects to create spectacular battle animations and spice up airship sequences.

> "WE HAVE ALWAYS TRIED TO BE AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF GAMING IN EACH ERA"
> SHINJI HASHIMOTO



» [PlayStation] Some people weren't used to emotional content in gaming – Aeris and her fate served as a sudden introduction.




» [SNES] *Final Fantasy VI* was a visual upgrade over its predecessors, with more detailed background work.

Despite having to adjust to working with brand-new technology, Square's team was able to complete *Final Fantasy IV* in just one year, meaning that the game arrived in July 1991, during the Super Famicom's launch year. 1.44 million copies were sold, reviews were highly positive, and it has retained a great deal of popularity over time, with Famitsu readers voting it the sixth best game of all time in 2006. *Final Fantasy IV* was also the game that marked *Final Fantasy*'s return to the West – however, it was named *Final Fantasy II* so as not to confuse American audiences, which had missed the previous two games. Unfortunately, the game was also simplified due to Square's concerns that it would be too large of a leap in complexity. A number of spells, items

# A LITTLE DISTRACTION

**Though the heroes of the Final Fantasy series are busy saving the world, they can always find time for minigames. Here are five of the best**



## G-BIKE

FINAL FANTASY VII

■ To be fair to Cloud and company, the initial G-Bike segment of *Final Fantasy VII* is a genuine life or death escape from Shinra headquarters. Playing it again in the Gold Saucer is pretty frivolous though, as was the standalone mobile version.



## TRIPLE TRIAD

FINAL FANTASY VIII

■ It's not exactly *Magic: The Gathering*, but *Final Fantasy VIII* has its own well-loved collectible card game that shines pretty brightly. Players take turns to place cards on a three-by-three grid, with directional attack statistics causing cards to be won and lost.




## BLITZBALL

FINAL FANTASY X

■ If you're going to make your protagonist a fictional sports star, you might as well let the players play that fictional sport while you're at it. While Blitzball gameplay isn't the all-action affair you'd expect from its FMV depiction, it's a fun diversion all the same.




and abilities were removed – including the consolidation of various status healing items into one catch-all remedy – items were made cheaper, and secret passages were made visible. Fans should seek out one of the more recent re-releases instead.

*Final Fantasy V* followed the story of Bartz Klauser, a wanderer who becomes wrapped up in a royal family's quest after happening upon a meteorite that had struck the planet. Mechanically, the biggest thing about *Final Fantasy V* is its incredibly expansive job system – you can assign one of 22 classes to any member of your party, giving you more choice than any other game in the series thus far.

When it was released in December 1992, *Final Fantasy V* became the series' bestselling game in Japan by selling 2.45 million copies. Unfortunately, *Final Fantasy V* was the third game not to receive a timely English translation. Though it was being worked on, Square once again felt that difficulty was an issue – translator Ted Woolsey told *Super Play* that "although the more experienced gamers loved the complex character building, it's just not accessible enough to the average gamer."

**F*inal Fantasy V* was also the first game in the series to spawn a direct spinoff story, in the form of an anime video series titled *Final Fantasy: Legend Of The Crystals*.** However, this was another major step in establishing the identity of the *Final Fantasy* series – spinoffs have become as big a deal as the main games themselves, and they've proven incredibly versatile. "That is probably because the series has such a strong foundation in the first place and fans have such positive memories of the worlds and characters in them that they always want to spend more time there," Hashimoto assures us. Indeed, the number of non-crossover spinoffs lends weight to his argument – many characters and stories have even returned for their own individual follow-up projects, including the likes of the episodic game *Final Fantasy IV: The After Years*, the handheld sequel *Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings* and the CGI movie *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.

*Final Fantasy VI* was the final game of the SNES era and one that started to shift the series away from traditional high-fantasy settings towards more sci-fi-influenced worlds – technological advances on display in the game's world include trains and drills, as well as coal mining. The story follows Terra Branford, a human-esper rescued from her Imperial captors by a resistance group. Technical advances over the previous SNES games were limited, and character customisation was once again simplified, allowing for characters to add equipment rather than going through job changes. Still, the game was exceptionally well-crafted, with amazing music, a lengthy main quest and memorable characters, particularly the main villain Kefka Palazzo. 2.62 million copies shifted in Japan following the game's April 1994 release, and a further 860,000 were sold in North America.

Though the first six games were obviously successful, *Final Fantasy* had been primarily a Japanese phenomenon for the first decade of its life. North America had received patchy support, and Europe hadn't been let in on the fun at all. This would all change with the introduction of *Final Fantasy VII*. It was an important game in many respects – it introduced 3D models and FMV to the *Final Fantasy* series, and marked the series' proper debut in Europe. Perhaps most significantly, ▶





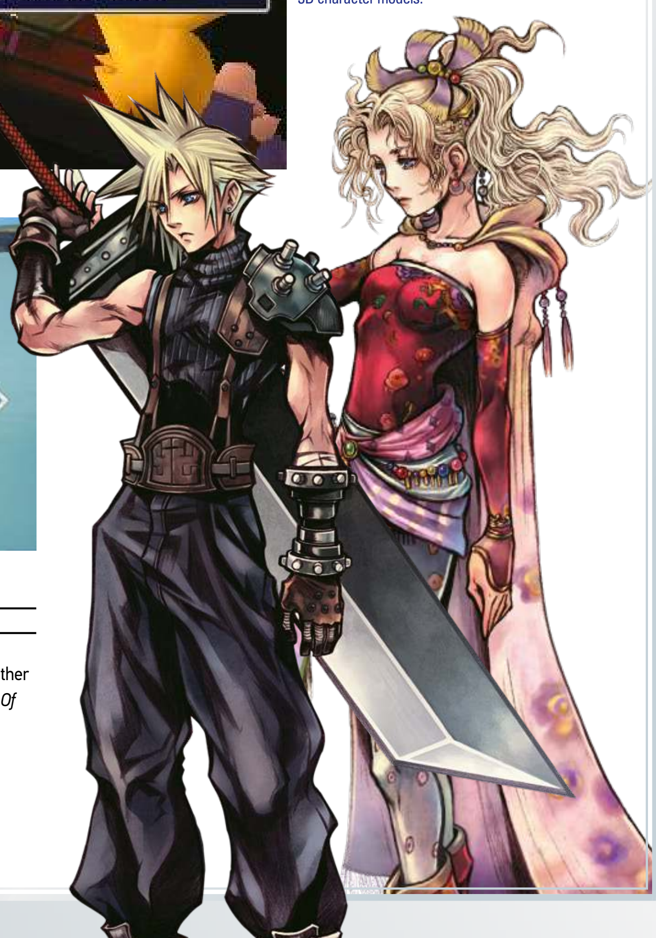







» [PlayStation] *Final Fantasy IX* was the last of the highly stylised games, and used humour liberally.

» [PlayStation] Custom scenes like this were only possible with the adoption of 3D character models.





## CHOCOBO RACING

### FINAL FANTASY XIV

■ The MMORPG isn't the first game to allow players to race the iconic birds of the *Final Fantasy* series, but unlike previous incarnations, it allows you to beat other players with your expertly trained Chocobo – that's worth the price of admission alone.



## FISHING

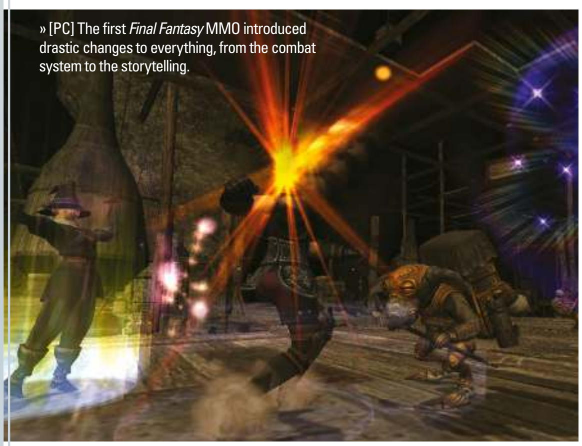
### FINAL FANTASY XV

■ In a game where 'hanging out with the guys' seems to be a major driving factor, fishing is an obvious inclusion. This is another minigame spun off into a standalone production, with *Monster Of The Deep: Final Fantasy XV* coming soon for PlayStation VR.



» [PlayStation] *Final Fantasy IX* had well and truly pushed the PlayStation to its limits, with no room left for technical improvement.


» [PS2] Rikku and Yuna took the lead in *Final Fantasy X-2* the first direct videogame sequel to a *Final Fantasy* game.

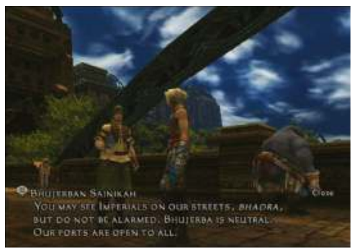

» [PC] The first *Final Fantasy* MMO introduced drastic changes to everything, from the combat system to the storytelling.




it marked the end of Squaresoft's historic link with Nintendo and the start of a strong relationship with Sony. *Final Fantasy VII* was set to be an epic and needed the massive storage afforded by CD-ROMs, a requirement at odds with Nintendo's decision to stick with cartridges for the N64.

It's fair to say that *Final Fantasy VII* revolutionised RPG production values. The basic elements of adventure, swords and sorcery remained, but where previous games had expressed this through small sprites and top-down or isometric viewpoints, *Final Fantasy VII* added previously unseen cinematic ambition. The use of polygonal characters on prerendered backdrops allowed for stunning wide shots of industrial facilities, claustrophobic close-ups in tight corridors, and even sequences overlaid on FMV. In the West, *Final Fantasy VII* blew away the stereotypical view of Japanese RPGs with an attractive sci-fi narrative. Critical acclaim followed, along with 10 million sales, making it the most popular game in the series.

For Hashimoto, it was a formative first experience with the series. "I have attachments to all the *Final Fantasy* games but the first one that I was actually involved in developing was *Final Fantasy VII*. *Final Fantasy VII* has some very strong memories for me. As well as the game itself, I was also involved



» [PS2] Vaan certainly wouldn't want to see Imperials – he rather hates them.



with the movie, and it was a very happy experience being able to take that to the Venice International Film festival."

With a brand-new audience captured, *Final Fantasy VIII* became the most highly anticipated entry in the series so far. The game signified some major changes for the *Final Fantasy* series, particularly in terms of artistic direction. Instead of the highly stylised character designs in past games, *Final Fantasy VIII* used realistic depictions of humans in all scenes. The game's plot followed Squall Leonhart and his fellow cadets from the SeeD military force, who start out by turning back advances from the hostile Republic of Galbadia.

**Magic points were dropped from the battle system, with characters instead required to 'draw' spells from points around the world, as well as enemies.** Magic could also be tied to your statistics via the Junction system, allowing you to stockpile spells to raise your stats. This ultimately proved to be somewhat broken, allowing players to build extraordinarily powerful characters too quickly.

Though critics loved it, *Final Fantasy VIII* can be a polarising game. Some of the millions who bought it in 1999 found themselves alienated by the new visual style and changes to the battle system. However, the game's fans will point to its incredible cinematic sequences, compelling (if convoluted) plot, and strong customisation elements as key qualities. 3.7 million copies were sold in Japan and 4.45 million elsewhere, which suggests that those fans might just be onto something.

The next three games in the series were all announced simultaneously, and were drastically different. *Final Fantasy IX* was a celebration of the past, offering one last set of stylised character designs in a classic kingdom setting – a merging of the old style of games with the latest production values. As the thief Zidane



» [PC] *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII* took combat realtime, to the delight of many.

"THE FIRST [FINAL FANTASY GAME] THAT I WAS ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING WAS FINAL FANTASY VII"

SHINJI HASHIMOTO

Tribal, you end up taking in Alexandria's princess Garnet after attempting to kidnap her, only to find that she's worried by Queen Brahne and will join you willingly. Classic character classes return and characters can gain permanent skills from equipment.

With 5.3 million copies sold worldwide, *Final Fantasy IX* is less popular than its PlayStation predecessors, despite critical consensus holding it as arguably the best *Final Fantasy* game overall. Part of this can be attributed to the series falling behind technological progress for the first time, because it arrived during the peak of PlayStation 2 hype, and people were already looking ahead to the game's successor.

*Final Fantasy X* was an exploitation of increased power in the present. While the game was very much a traditionally structured entry in the *Final Fantasy* series, the arrival of the PlayStation 2 gave Square access to sufficient graphical power to move away from prerendered backgrounds, replacing them with realtime 3D environments. Additionally, the large capacity of DVDs allowed for the introduction of voice acting. The game follows Tidus, a Blitzball star in his native Zanarkand, who finds himself stranded in a place called Spira following the appearance of a destructive beast known as Sin. *Final Fantasy X* sold an enormous 6.6 million copies worldwide following its July 2001 release, and in 2006 Famitsu readers voted it the best game of all time.

*Final Fantasy XI* took the series in a whole new direction, as the first massively multiplayer online RPG in the series. Players are allowed to create their own characters and wander freely around the world of Vana'diel, banding together with others to complete missions and advance the story. The initial antagonist was the resurrected Shadow Lord, who needed to be defeated, but years of expansions and add-on content have shifted the focus of the storyline. The game was primarily developed for the PC and released in 2002, but gained cross-platform support with the PlayStation 2, and then an Xbox 360 version followed in 2006.



» [PC] As the series' most recent MMO, *Final Fantasy XIV* has a lively population congregating in its bustling towns.

**Numbering *Final Fantasy XI* as part of the main series was a bold move, but one that showed confidence in the game and ultimately paid off handsomely.** The game reached break-even at 200,000 monthly subscribers, and had up to 300,000 daily players during 2003. In 2012, Square Enix announced that the game was the most profitable *Final Fantasy* title of all, and although the PS2 and Xbox 360 servers have been closed, the PC servers are still active, ensuring its status as one of the longest-running MMORPGs.

In the modern era, Square Enix has spent more time exploring the universes it has established. *Final Fantasy XII* (the making of which precedes this feature) was followed up very quickly with ▶






» [PS2] *Final Fantasy XII*'s battle system was controversial, with some fans accusing the game of playing itself.




# FLIGHTS OF FANTASY

**We investigate the many spinoffs of the Final Fantasy universe**



## CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

FIRST RELEASE: **2003**
GAMES: **7**

■ First released on the GameCube and developed by The Game Designers Studio, *Crystal Chronicles* not only boastsed extensive GBA compatibility, but it also featured real-time fighting that instantly made it stand apart from the core *Final Fantasy* games.

The series has continued to evolve with subsequent releases, such as *My Life As A King*, which introduced city building, and *My Life As A Darklord*, which was a well-regarded tower defence game. The 2007 *Ring Of Fates* was a standalone release for the Nintendo DS, while the 2009 Wii exclusive, *The Crystal Bearers*, was the last current game in the series to be released.

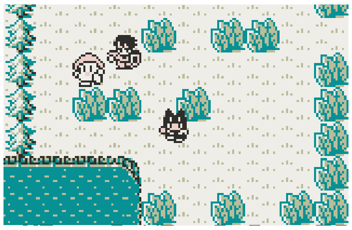
## CHOCOBO GAMES

FIRST RELEASE: **1997**
GAMES: **19**

■ Although the series has received more games than any other *Final Fantasy* spinoff, only a handful were released outside of Japan. The first game in the series, *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*, never arrived in the West, although we did get to enjoy the 1999 sequel, *Chocobo's Dungeon 2. Chocobo Racing* was a decent-ish stab at a *Mario Kart* racer, while *Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales* for the DS was a card-based RPG that received a Japanese-exclusive sequel.

*Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon* improved on the original *Chocobo Dungeon* formula by adding new mechanics, like a job system, while *Chocobo Panic* was a bizarre variant on the old electronic game, *Simon*.





## MANA SERIES

FIRST RELEASE: **1991**
GAMES: **10**

■ This is something of an odd inclusion but we're including it due to its origins. Known as *Seiken Densetsu: Final Fantasy Gaiden* in Japan, this Game Boy spinoff was called *Final Fantasy Adventure* in the states and *Mystic Quest* in Europe. Highly regarded as one of the best action games on Nintendo's portable, it eventually led to the critically-acclaimed *Secret Of Mana* in 1993. The series continued to move away from the *Final Fantasy* elements found in the original game, and is now considered a franchise in its own right. Interestingly, the last released game was *Adventures Of Mana* in 2016 for iOS and PS Vita, which was essentially a 3D remake of the original game.

## FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

FIRST RELEASE: **1997**
GAMES: **4**

■ Unlike other *Final Fantasy* games, those in the *Tactics* series are strategy RPGs and very good ones at that. The original game was released on PlayStation in 1997 and was critically received at the time. It was eventually updated in the form of *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War Of The Lions* for PSP, and later iOS and Android.

*Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* followed on Game Boy Advance in 2003. It's not an actual sequel and is set in a dream world alternative of Ivalice. Its DS sequel, *Grimoire Of The Rift*, is actually set in the real version of Ivalice. The last game in the series, *Final Fantasy Tactics S*, was released in 2013 for iOS and Android, but closed its servers the following year.





## CRYSTAL DEFENDERS

FIRST RELEASE: **2008**
GAMES: **2**

■ Originally known as *Crystal Guardians*, this interesting tower defence series started off life by being released on three separate mobile services in Japan, before eventually being consolidated and released on iOS (and later, Xbox 360 and PS3) as *Crystal Defenders*. As with *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* and its DS sequel, *Crystal Defenders* is set in *Final Fantasy XII*'s world of Ivalice, and features extremely distinctive artwork. A sequel, *Crystal Defenders: Vanguard Storm*, followed in 2009, which was specifically designed to work with a touch screen, and introduced new mechanics, including a fun take on 'rock-paper-scissors'. No additional games are currently being planned.

## DISSIDIA FINAL FANTASY

FIRST RELEASE: **2008**
GAMES: **3**

■ *Dissidia* settles one of *Final Fantasy*'s biggest arguments: who would win in a fight between Cloud Strife and Squall Lionheart? It also answers many other hypothetical matches, as it allows a huge number of popular characters from the first ten games in the series (with one additional hero from *FFXI* and *FFXII*) to battle each other in arena-based combat.

*Dissidia 012 Final Fantasy* followed in 2011 and acted as both a prequel and a remake and introduced nine additional characters and tweaked many of the existing abilities of existing heroes. The most recent game, *Dissidia Final Fantasy*, was released in arcades in 2015 and is due to appear on PS4 in 2018.





## KINGDOM HEARTS

FIRST RELEASE: **2002**
GAMES: **8**

■ A chance meeting in an elevator led to one of the most popular crossovers of recent memory. Joining Disney characters with those from the worlds of *Final Fantasy* seems an odd decision, but it works well. The original game sets the scene, introducing new characters – Sora, Riku and Kairi – and having them interact with some of Disney's biggest movies, from *The Little Mermaid* to *Tarzan*.

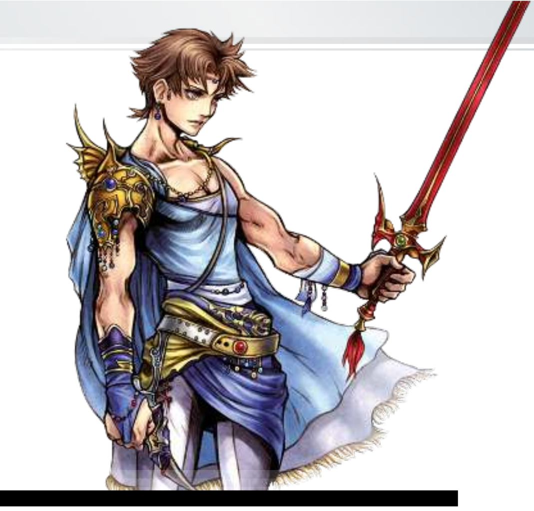
A core sequel, *Kingdom Hearts II*, was released in 2005, while *Kingdom Hearts III* is due sometime in 2018, but there are also countless minisequels and prequels as well as several HD remakes that can make it a little bewildering to those who haven't followed the series.

## SAGA SERIES

FIRST RELEASE: **1989**
GAMES: **12**

■ This is another series that started off as a *Final Fantasy* spinoff before forming into its own standalone series. The two Game Boy sequels were eventually remade for the Nintendo DS, but were exclusive to Japan. The next three games were exclusive to the Super Famicom and were known as *Romancing SaGa 1-3. SaGa Frontier 1* and *2* were exclusive to PlayStation, while *Unlimited SaGa* and *Romancing SaGa: Minstrel Song* (an enhanced remake) debuted on the PS2. *Emperors SaGa* followed in 2012, which was exclusively for the GREE platform, while *Imperial SaGa* was exclusive to PC. The most recent game, *SaGa: Scarlet Grace*, was released for the PS Vita in 2016.







## THEATRHYTHM

FIRST RELEASE: **2012**
GAMES: **3**

■ Considering how famed the *Final Fantasy* series is for its intricately designed compositions, we're surprised it took so long for a rhythm action game to receive a release. Developed by indieszero, it works as a brilliant slice of fan service, delivering some of the franchise's biggest tunes and marrying them to a number of entertaining game modes. A quasi-sequel, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy: Curtain Call*, was released in 2014, and enhanced the base game and introduced a new mode called Medley Quests. It also featured 221 songs and 60 characters, with additional ones being available in the form of DLC. The most recent game in the series focuses on the *Dragon Quest* franchise.



## WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY

FIRST RELEASE: **2016**
GAMES: **1**

■ Tose, Division 3 and Square Enix Business worked together on *World Of Final Fantasy* as a celebration of the franchise's 30th anniversary. As with the *Kingdom Hearts* series, it features new protagonists (Lann and Reynn) but has them interact with a large number of classic characters and monsters from the popular franchise.

Set in the world of Grymoire, it features a distinctive chibi-like style, which some may find a little too cute for their tastes. It works well, however, ensuring the likes of Cloud Strife and Lightning are instantly recognisable. It's notable for having a long development period, so the localisation could be as close to the original Japanese dialogue as possible.

▶ a handheld sequel, and Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 owners were catered to with the *Final Fantasy XIII* series, a trilogy of games released between 2009 and 2014 with Lightning as the figurehead.

**The *Final Fantasy XIII* trilogy was particularly interesting to watch, as the gameplay changed quite a lot between each instalment.** While *Final Fantasy XIII* did well with critics, it was roundly criticised for its linearity and Lightning's cold personality. "We do take on board the opinions of our fans, but at the same time we balance that with the unique personality and vision of each episode's director and make full use of those as well," notes Hashimoto. The results of that listening process were *Final Fantasy XIII-2*, a less linear game with a reduced emphasis on Lightning, and *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII*, an open world game that gives the player full choice over the quests they take and a real-time combat system. Despite these changes, neither game did quite as well as the original with critics.

Another game that came in for criticism was *Final Fantasy XIV*, the second MMORPG entry in the series set in the world of Eorzea. The initial response to the game in 2010 was incredibly poor, based on its gameplay and interface. Square Enix responded by dropping the game's fees completely and making improvements, but it wasn't enough – eventually, the servers were shuttered in 2012, and the game was replaced in 2013 with *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn*, a much better version that is currently active with a player base that's over 800,000 subscribers.

That's a non-traditional solution to a bad game, but it's fair to say that after 30 years, it's clear that *Final Fantasy* can forge its own path without being beholden to history. 2016's *Final Fantasy XV* is a great example of that – if you brought a *Final Fantasy* fan from the late Eighties to the present day, the Xbox One and PS4 game would be practically unrecognisable to them, given that the common image is a bunch of guys driving around in a car. Yet the open structure, contemporary clothing styles and real-time combat all make sense when you look at how the series has developed over the last three decades, and it's plain to see that people who became hooked on *Final Fantasy* many years ago are still going along for the ride with Square Enix.



» [PS4] Realtime combat expanded into a team environment in *Final Fantasy XV*.

**"WE DO TAKE ON BOARD THE OPINIONS OF OUR FANS, BUT AT THE SAME TIME WE BALANCE THAT WITH THE UNIQUE PERSONALITY AND VISION OF EACH EPISODE'S DIRECTOR"**

SHINJI HASHIMOTO



» [Xbox One] Do chocobos count as luxury travel in *Final Fantasy XV*? These guys are more accustomed to their car.

So, how does Hashimoto see the series as it reaches its thirtieth anniversary? "It would be easy to sum up those 30 years in some way, but I really could not even begin to talk about the series without mentioning the sheer passion and ability of all the talented creators that have worked on *Final Fantasy* over its lifetime," he says, offering credit to the development teams. Although it can be debated which individual elements have most heavily driven the success of the series, for Hashimoto there's no individual unique selling point. "I think that one of *Final Fantasy*'s biggest strengths is that sheer energy that comes through when you combine all the different elements together: the characters, the story, CG and music etc.."

Indeed, while *Final Fantasy* has adapted to changing tastes over the years, the desire for it to be at the forefront of the Japanese RPG market has never wavered. "The *Final Fantasy* series will continue to be a hungry contender, always taking on new challenges and pushing for the top. Nobody knows what the future holds but I think that the series will continue to produce unique and imaginative games," Hashimoto concludes. Given the experiences that philosophy has produced over the last 30 years, we'll definitely be keeping our eyes on *Final Fantasy* over the years to come. ✱

CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Starglider

» **PLATFORM:** ATARI ST » **DEVELOPER:** ARGONAUT » **RELEASED:** 1986

**Sometimes, the lasers in an AGAV – Airborne Ground Attack Vehicle, to civvies like you – just don't cut it.** Sure, you might be able to take out a walker or stomper with them, but by the same token you can rust a hole through an iron plate if you leave it out in the rain for long enough. Unlike rain, your laser energy is in short supply. So what is a pilot to do?

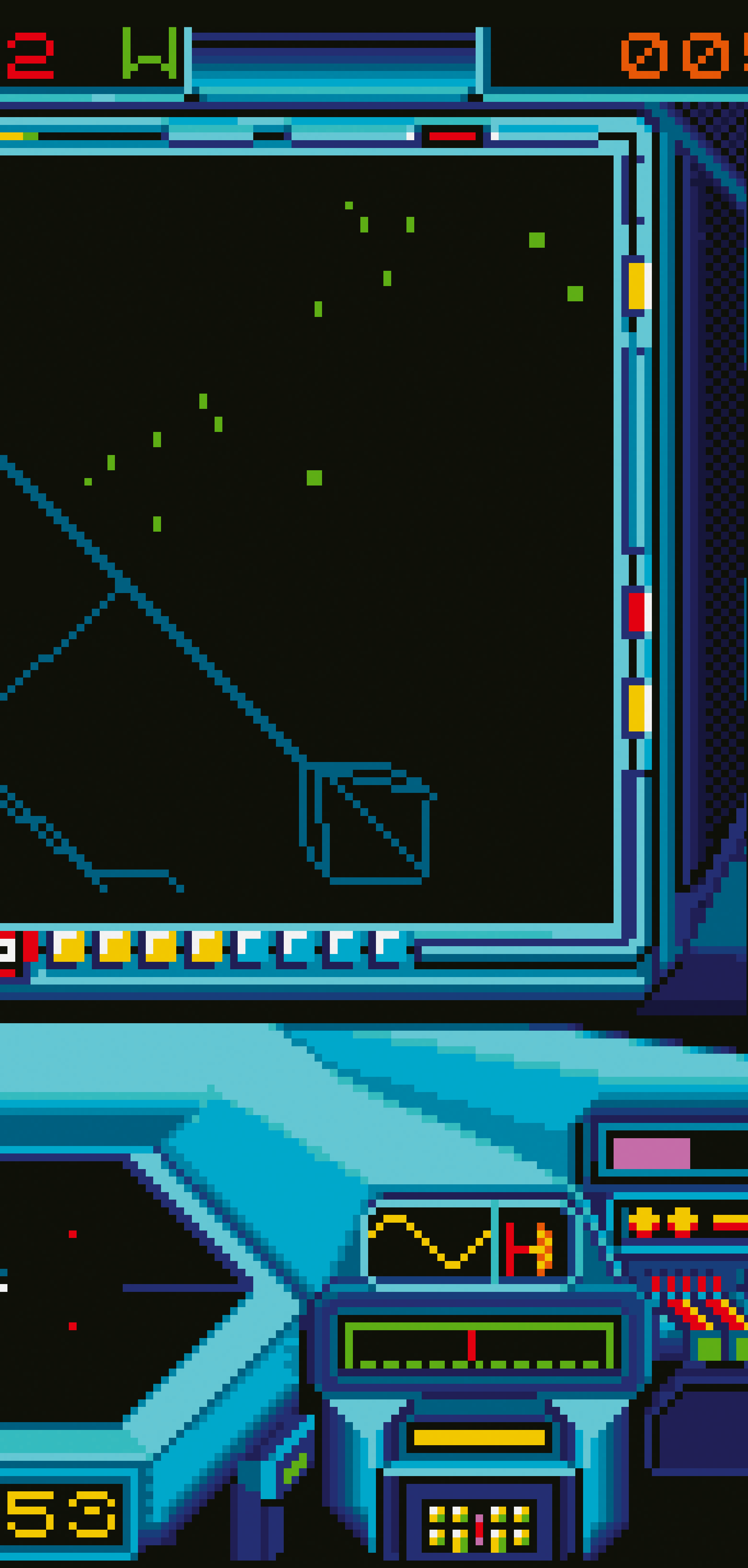
The answer comes in the form of the Television Guided Missile System, a piece of heavy ordnance composed of a proton missile with a high definition video camera attached. The only problem is that it's a bit like a wayward child – the missile might claim to be guided, but it basically does its own thing and you provide it with helpful suggestions it may or may not follow. So when one corkscrews out of the launcher and blows a nearby walker to smithereens, well, even bitter old pilots like us have to crack a smile at a sight like that. *




## BIO

With 3D wireframe visuals that moved smoothly across the screen, *Starglider* was a remarkable display of how advanced the 16-bit Atari ST and Commodore Amiga were, as compared to their 8-bit predecessors. Equally remarkable was the fact that designer Jez San was barely an adult when *Starglider* took the computer gaming scene by storm in 1986, having turned 20 years old just months prior to finishing the game. The success of the game would result in a 1988 sequel, *Starglider 2*, and established developer Argonaut as a leader in 3D game development on home systems during the late Eighties and early Nineties.





# MORE CLASSIC STARGLIDER MOMENTS

## Chasing The Starglider



Starglider drones are dangerous, and information in the silos suggests that you shouldn't engage. But hey, you're a brave AGAV pilot – no recommendation is going to stop you from tailing that sucker and ensuring that it never takes flight again. You'll have to fly fast and be prepared to take some damage, but they're immensely satisfying targets to take down.

## Kaboom!



While this may look like a shower of rectangles, we'll have you know that it's a *symbolic* shower of rectangles. *Starglider* could have gone with a simple explosion sprite to denote an enemy going down, but that wasn't enough. Instead the designers went for a geometrical shattering effect that looked cool and made blowing up enemy craft extremely satisfying.

## Making Dock



Your laser energy is down to nothing and your shield is low. You see the entrance to dock into a silo, but it's facing the wrong way and there are two missile launchers in your midst. As you hold out long enough for the entrance to rotate and allow you to dock, replenishing your energy, the relief that overwhelms your entire being is incredible.

## That Theme Tune



We often focus on the visual in Classic Moments, but Dave Lowe's classic opening theme had to make the cut here. Forget beeping chiptunes – this was a proper pop-style song! It even had vocals, which was impressive for the time. We're sure you remember the first time you heard your machine blast "Staaarglider!"






# COLLECTING Code Masters

**The range of tape games are proving popular with collectors today. Martyn Carroll looks at their appeal and reveals the coveted releases**






» [Amstrad CPC] *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* was not only the last 8-bit Dizzy game, but also full-priced.

**Brothers Richard and David Darling had one clear objective when they established Codemasters in October 1986: "To sell only the best possible games at the best possible price."** There's no question that they achieved the price promise, with their range of 8-bit games retailing for the standard budget price of £1.99, eventually rising to £2.99 and £3.99 as the market matured. As for the quality of the games, well that's clearly subjective, yet it's generally accepted that Codemasters were one of the more reliable publishers of original budget games. It released a few scrappy titles for sure, but most were good and some were great. Overall, you were unlikely to feel ripped-off when you handed over some loose change for the latest Codemasters release.

For collectors, quality is something of a moot point anyway, as the simple aim is to collect them all, whether that's the full range on one format, or the complete 8-bit set. Codemasters' main 8-bit platforms were the ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC, and it released (excluding compilations) 110, 100 and 91 titles for those machines respectively. It also released a handful of titles for the Commodore 16, Atari 8-bit, MSX and BBC/Electron. Crucially, the majority of the games were issued in single jewel cases with uniform white inlays, so they look great on a shelf. It's not hard to see why Codemasters is a big draw for collectors.

One issue for collectors is that the games are not conveniently numbered. Most titles have a four-digit product number displayed on the spine – beginning '1' on the C64, '2' on the Spectrum, '3' on the CPC, and so on – but there's no obvious sequence to the numbering. As such, it can be difficult to build up a complete and verified ▶




» [Amstrad CPC] The Oliver twins were extremely prolific on the Codemasters label. This is the rather entertaining *Grand Prix Simulator*.

## COLLECTOR Q&A

Budget game fan Guy Black owns hundreds of Codemasters titles…

**What are your reasons for collecting Codemasters titles?**

I started collecting for the Spectrum about 15 years ago. I used to download games from the World of Spectrum website, but none of the Codemasters games are available for copyright reasons. This inspired me to start picking up the odd game from eBay. Before I knew it, I was going after a complete set.

**Which 8-bit formats do you collect for, and how close are you to getting full sets?**

I have a full set of Codemasters games for the BBC/Electron, Commodore 16, Atari 8-bit and MSX. My Spectrum set is one tape (*Sergeant Seymour Robotcop*) and one disk (*Rock Star Ate My Hamster*) away from completion. I've just recently started grabbing a few tapes for the Amstrad CPC as well, and have around 30 so far.

**In your experience, which are the rarest Codemasters titles, and what's the most you've spent to secure certain games?**

Prices have been going through the roof for some games. The rarer titles are some of the later Spectrum games that were released in 1992-1993, towards the end of the format's commercial life. *DJ Puff* is particularly hard to find, along with a couple of the Seymour games. Myself, I paid less than a tenner for *Grell & Fella* a few years ago. I paid £35 for *Stuntman Seymour* last year and I think the most I've paid is £50 for the CD Games Pack. Although I suspect if I find a copy of *Sergeant*




» Some of Guy's big-box releases that complement the standard, single jewel case titles.



» A small selection of Guy's almost complete Spectrum set.

*Seymour* or the disk version of *Rock Star* for the Spectrum, my wallet may take a beating.

**Fans are naturally drawn to the Dizzy games, but are there any other Codemasters games you would recommend collecting?**

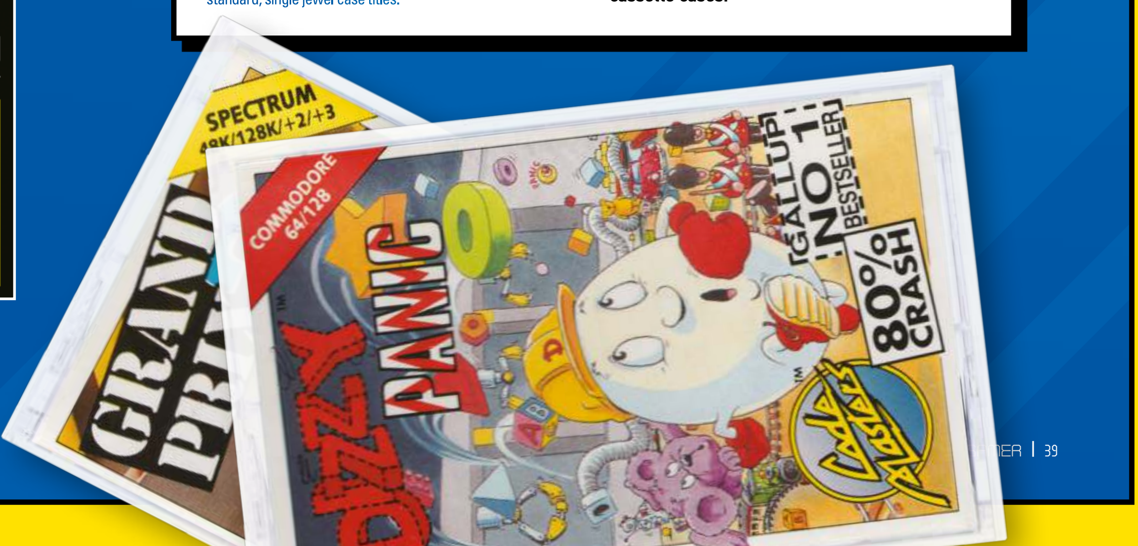
I really like the Seymour games and think they are up there with the Dizzy franchise, and finding the rarer titles can be both fun and frustrating in equal measure. I used to buy quite a few of the Quattro packs when I was younger. They were a good way of getting four games for little money.

**For those looking to start collecting Codemasters, what would you suggest are the best ways to acquire them?**

There's a lot of interest out there in Codies games. Look for bundles on auction sites and check out some of the groups on Facebook. There are many collectors in those groups who buy bundles of games and sell off their duplicates at very reasonable prices. There's a very friendly community of collectors out there who really like to help each other out.

**Which other software ranges would you recommend as good ones to collect?**

I love collecting budget re-releases. I rarely bought full-price games as a young 'un. I have been collecting Hit Squad, Kixx and Mastertronic titles for years and almost have full sets of each. They are generally cheap to pick up and take up little space, being single cassette cases.






▶ catalogue of all releases. The list that follows this feature has been compiled from multiple sources and we believe it to be 100 per cent complete and accurate for all seven 8-bit formats that Codemasters supported.

**As with all collections, the prices vary wildly.** The majority of releases – such as the many 'Simulator' titles which became synonymous with Codemasters – are hugely abundant and can usually be picked up for around the same price as they originally retailed for, or even less in some cases. This means that the bulk of the collection can be amassed with little outlay. However, some releases are much scarcer and therefore command far higher prices. Codemasters continued to support the 8-bit computers until 1993, by which point the market had shrunk dramatically and the later titles sold in much smaller numbers. Therefore you may have pay upwards of £100 to obtain some of these titles.

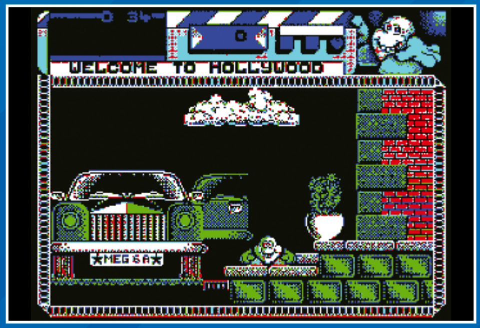
> "The highest prices are typically reserved for the Spectrum versions"

One thing to note is that the highest prices are typically reserved for the Spectrum versions. The price of Spectrum games in general is rocketing at the moment, no doubt due to the buzz around the various Speccy devices in development, and this is causing the price of the rarest Codemasters releases to rise and rise. Some titles in the Amstrad range can also command decent prices, although not in the same league as the Spectrum equivalents. At the other end of the scale is the C64 where, for reasons unknown, the releases just don't attract the same attention. A case in point: the sixth Dizzy game, *Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, will fetch £50 minimum on the Spectrum any day of the week, yet on the C64 it can be grabbed for around £5. If you're looking to collect Codemasters without breaking the bank then the C64 is the format to go for – and as an added bonus, there are some quality, exclusive titles not available on the other formats, like *Lazer Force*, *Thunderbolt* and *Slicks*.

We mentioned Dizzy just now, and for most people the Dizzy series will be the cornerstone of any Codemasters collection. The first four titles in the adventure series, along with the various arcade spin-offs, can be picked up easily and cheaply. The fifth, sixth and seventh games – *Spellbound Dizzy*, *Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk* and *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* – are relatively rare and require deeper




» [C64] The ubiquitous *BMX Simulator* was Codemasters' first mega-hit and set the company on the road to success.




» [Amstrad CPC] When you're done with Dizzy, you should spend some quality time with the Seymour games.

## TOP TEN RARITIES

*If you're collecting Codemasters then you'll need to dig deep for these releases*




### ROCK STAR GOES BIZARRE!

1988

■ This special version of *Rock Star Ate My Hamster* was created for a promotional competition that ran in *The Sun* newspaper. The game featured unique content and just ten copies were produced for the lucky winners. A copy of the Spectrum version popped up on eBay in July 2016 and went for £125. If another appears, it's likely to top that, with speculation that it may hit £200.

### CD GAMES PACK

1989

■ The novel compilation featured 30 games on a CD-ROM that could be loaded into your computer via a standard CD audio player. It originally retailed for £20 and these days it will fetch around three times that amount, although only if it comes complete with the data transfer cable, loader tape and manual. It's common to find examples with bits missing, typically the cable.







### DIZZY PRINCE OF THE YOLKFOLK

1991

■ The sixth game in the series originally debuted on the 1991 collection *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures*, and despite the promise that it was exclusive to the pack, it was released as a standalone title in 1992. This short and sweet adventure now fetches £50-70 on the Spectrum. Its immediate predecessor, *Spellbound Dizzy*, is also a target for collectors and commands a similar value.

### SUPERSTAR SEYMOUR

1992

■ Playing second fiddle to Dizzy but still a draw for collectors, the five Seymour games were gathered together for this compilation that was sold in the run-up to Christmas 1992. It's typically worth £30 and upwards these days, particularly if the original poster and collectable cards are included. That may sound expensive, but it's certainly cheaper than collecting the individual releases.



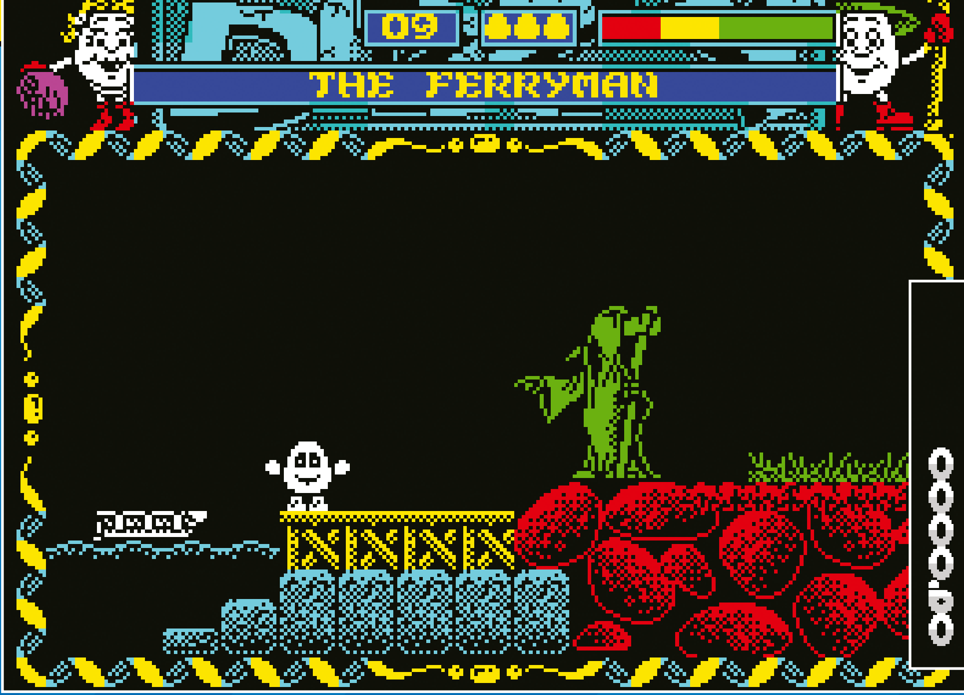




### SERGEANT SEYMOUR ROBOTCOP

1992

■ As with *Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, this first appeared on a compilation (*Superstar Seymour*) before being released separately. This doesn't appear in trading circles too often, so it's difficult to gauge its current value, but it's certainly rare and would set you back £60 minimum. This is for the coveted Spectrum version, of course – you could snap up the other versions for less.




» [ZX Spectrum] You'll need to pay the ferryman handsomely if you want to own the Speccy version of *Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk.*

» [ZX Spectrum] *Miami Chase* was one of the few Codemasters games to not appear on the Amstrad.






pockets, particularly on the Spectrum. There are other sets to collect too, like the five games starring Seymour – although some of those are as sought-after as the later Dizzy games, once again on the Spectrum mainly. A less expensive target is the numbered 'Cartoon Time' titles, of which there are five to collect, including *Olli & Lissa 3* (the sequel to the earlier Telecomsoft games) and *Frankenstein Jnr* (which was actually a reskin of CRL's *Bride Of Frankenstein*).

**In 1988 Codemasters released its 'Plus' range of games (which came on two cassettes and retailed for £4.99) and these throw up some interesting quirks for collectors.** The *Race Against Time* charity game has two cover variations as the original photo of Olympian Jesse Owens had to be replaced with one of Carl Lewis. The titles *Professional BMX Simulator* and *Jet Bike Simulator* were later re-released as standard budget games, only they were renamed *BMX Simulator 2* and *Championship Jet Ski Simulator*, so collectors will need to grab both versions. On the C64 Super Dragon Slayer was initially released as a 'Plus' game before being re-released at the regular price, albeit with the same title in this case.

Then there's the 'Gold' range, which comprised just two titles: *4 Soccer Simulators* and *Rock Star Ate My Hamster.* Both were released at full-price (£9.99), and on the Spectrum and Amstrad they were the only instances where disk versions were also issued (on the C64, several of the earlier titles were also available to buy on disk). Later on, both titles were re-released as budget titles, so once again collectors will need to double-dip. *Rock Star* is particularly interesting as there's an additional, super-limited edition out there of which only a handful of copies are known to exist. For more on that and other highly coveted titles, see 'Top Ten Rarities' below. ★

## SEYMOUR STUNTMAN

1992

■ Of the five Seymour games, this and *Sergeant Seymour* are the ones that attract the most attention from collectors. This platformer appears on eBay from time to time and its price just keeps going up. In the past six months, the Spectrum version has gone for between £89 and £113. This range is probably a good price guide, but don't be too surprised to see it creep up to £120 in the near future.





## GRELL & FELLA

1992

■ Another late era release that most gamers will be unfamiliar with, but Codies collectors will know all about this one as it's on many a 'most wanted' list. This cartoony adventure (which is actually titled *Grell & Falla* in-game) doesn't come up for sale regularly and when it does, you can expect it to go for £80-120 on the Spectrum. A C64 version was developed but not released at the time.

## CRYSTAL KINGDOM DIZZY

1992

■ The final Dizzy game for 8-bit computers broke the budget trend and retailed at full-price when it was released in late 1992. This no-doubt affected sales and now Dizzy's seventh adventure is perhaps the most sought-after of the whole series. On a good day you may be able to bag the Spectrum version for around the £80 mark, but it has been known to go for up to £120 in the past.





## DJ PUFF

1993

■ This sequel to *Little Puff* sneaked onto the Spectrum in 1993, almost three years after the original, and will have therefore escaped the attention of many gamers. It's a different story these days as many collectors are trying to track down a copy. It's hard to say how much the Spectrum version is worth, but it's possibly the rarest of all the regular Codies 8-bit releases. You're talking at least £120.

## WRESTLING SUPERSTARS

1993

■ Codemasters leapt on the wrestling bandwagon with this cut-price, low-rent copy of Ocean's *WWF WrestleMania* games. Quality counts for nowt however as this was one of the firm's last 8-bit releases, arriving in early 1993 and making it a target for collectors. It's not super rare, but when it does swap hands it can fetch up to £30, and sometimes even more if it's the Spectrum version.

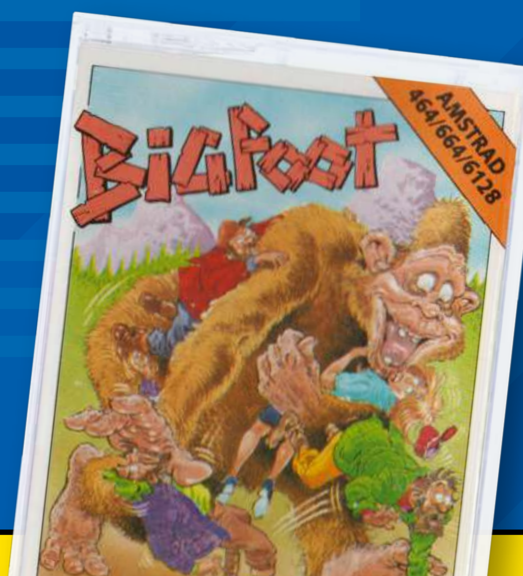


# CODEMASTERS CHECKLIST

Whether you're looking to collect one format or the complete 8-bit set, this list will prove invaluable




| | ZX | CPC | C64 | C16 | A8 | MSX | BBC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Division Manager | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 3D Starfighter | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 4 Soccer Simulators | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 4 Soccer Simulators (Gold) | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 750cc Grand Prix | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Advanced Pinball Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | | |
| Arcade Flight Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Armourdillo | | | ■ | | | | |
| ATV Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Big Nose's American Adventure | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Bigfoot | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Blade Warrior | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| BMX Freestyle | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| BMX Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | |
| BMX Simulator 2 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Bounty Hunter | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Brainache | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Bubble Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Captain Dynamo | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Cartoon Collection* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *CD Games Pack* | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Championship Jet Ski Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| CJ In The USA | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| CJ's Elephant Antics | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Cosmonut | | | ■ | | | | |
| Creations | | | ■ | | | | |
| Crystal Kingdom Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Cue Boy | | | ■ | | | | |
| Danger Zone | | | | ■ | | | |
| Death Stalker | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Defender Light Gun* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Dizzy Collection* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Dizzy Down The Rapids | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Dizzy Panic | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| DJ Puff | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Fantasy World Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Fast Food | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Frankenstein Jnr | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Fruit Machine Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | | ■ |
| Fruit Machine Simulator 2 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Ghost Hunters | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| G-Man | | | | ■ | | | |
| Grand Prix Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | | |
| Grand Prix Simulator 2 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Grell & Fella | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Guardian Angel | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Hit Squad, The | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| International Rugby Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Italian Supercar | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Jet Bike Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Kamikaze | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| KGB Superspy | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Kwik Snax | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Lazer Force | | | ■ | | | | |
| Little Puff | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Magicland Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Mean Machine | | | ■ | | | | |
| *Mega-Hot* | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Miami Chase | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| MiG 29 Soviet Fighter | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Mission Jupiter | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Monte Carlo Casino | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Moto X Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Mountain Bike 500 | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Mr Angry | | | ■ | | | | |
| Murray Mouse Supercop | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Necris Dome | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Ninja Massacre | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Olli & Lissa 3 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Operation Gunship | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Paris To Dakar | ■ | | | | | | |






| | ZX | CPC | C64 | C16 | A8 | MSX | BBC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phantomas | ■ | | | | | | |
| Poltergeist | | | ■ | | | | |
| Prince Clumsy | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Pro Boxing Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | ■ |
| Pro Golf Simulator | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Pro Powerboat Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Pro Skateboard Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Pro Tennis Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Professional BMX Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Professional Ski Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Professional Snooker Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | ■ | |
| Pub Trivia Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Quattro Adventure* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Quattro Arcade* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Quattro Cartoon* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Quattro Coin-Ops* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Quattro Combat* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Fantastic* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Fighters* | ■ | | | | | | |
| *Quattro Firepower* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Megastars* | ■ | | | | | | |
| *Quattro Power* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Racers* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Skills* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Sports* | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| *Quattro Super Hits* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Race Against Time, The | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Rallycross Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Red Max | | | ■ | | ■ | | |
| Robin Hood Legend Quest | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Rock Star Ate My Hamster | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Rock Star Ate My Hamster (Gold) | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| SAS Combat Simulator | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Sergeant Seymour Robotcop | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Seymour Goes To Hollywood | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Seymour Stuntman | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Sky High Stuntman | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Slicks | | | ■ | | | | |
| Slightly Magic | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Smash 16* | ■ | | | | | | |
| Soccer Pinball | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Spellbound Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Spike In Transylvania | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Star Runner | ■ | | | | | | |
| Steg The Slug | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Street Gang Football | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Stryker In The Crypts Of Trogan | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Super All-Stars* | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Super Bike TransAm | ■ | | | | | | |
| Super Dragon Slayer | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Super Dragon Slayer (Plus) | | | ■ | | | | |
| Super G-Man | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Super Hero | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Super Robin Hood | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Super Seymour Saves The Planet | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Super Stuntman | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Super Tank | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| *Superstar Seymour* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Tarzan Goes Ape | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Terra Cognita | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | |
| Thunderbolt | | | ■ | | | | |
| Tilt | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| Tornado ECR | ■ | | | | | | |
| Transmuter | ■ | ■ | | | ■ | | |
| Treasure Island Dizzy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Turbo Chopper Simulator | | ■ | | | | | |
| Turbo The Tortoise | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Twin Turbo V8 | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| Vampire | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | ■ | |
| Wacky Darts | ■ | | ■ | | | | |
| White Heat | ■ | | | | | | |
| Wild West Seymour | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Wizard Willy | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Wrestling Superstars | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |

*Titles in italics are compilations.*









# Mega-CD

**» MANUFACTURER:** Sega **» YEAR:** 1990 **» COST:** Launch: ¥49,800 (approx £270), Today: £100

Back in the early Nineties it seemed like every major player was intent on releasing its own CD-ROM-based console to battle the competition with. First out of the gates was NEC with its impressive and highly-desirable PC Engine CD-ROM2 system, an expansion for its popular (at least in Japan) PC Engine. Nintendo and Sega answered back with add-ons of their own. Nintendo's effort, collaborating with Sony, was canned, but Sega's made it to market, arriving in December 1991, three years after NEC's ambitious piece of hardware.

The machine itself is an odd, but collectible system, full of all sorts of weird curios and rammed with a large number of FMV games that weren't always the best from a gameplay point of view, but did give an early indication of the cinematic direction that games would head in. While much was promised of the storage capacity found in CDs it was rarely utilised on Sega's console and many of its games were simply the original Mega Drive offerings, but with FMV intros and redbook soundtracks – it had enhanced sound hardware in general – that made use of the additional storage space. Great original games existed, of course, and there was a few developers, such as Core Design, that pushed the machine to its limits, but for the most part it felt like a stepping stone, a chance for Sega to have a rest and better understand how best to use the new storage medium. *






## Mega-CD fact

■ Numerous companies built additional variations of the Mega-CD. Victor combined it with the Mega Drive to create the Wondermega, while Aiwa added the combination to a boombox.

## EDITOR'S CHOICE

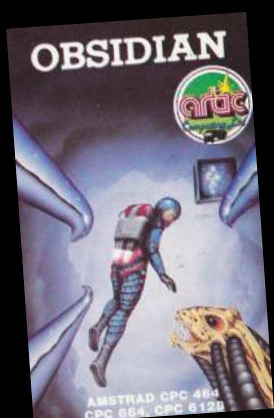


### Thunderhawk

This helicopter-based blaster was one of the best-looking games on Sega's add-on and a clear indication of what was possible when developers could be bothered to push the limits of the system. Unlike many Mega-CD games of the time, *Thunderhawk*'s impressive-looking visuals would have been impossible to achieve on a standard Mega Drive, ensuring owners of the game would have felt understandably smug.

# OBSI

**Want to be a spaceman and work in the sky? The CPC-only jet pack game Obsidian offered you that very opportunity, but, boy, was it hard. Creator Tony Warriner talks to David Crookes about the game which sent his career skywards**

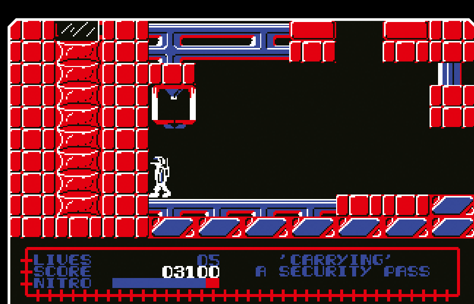



## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ARTIC COMPUTING
- » **DEVELOPER:** TONY WARRINER
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC
- » **PLATFORM:** ADVENTURE

**When you play *Obsidian*, it's easy to get lost as you navigate your main character around the game's maze of screens, coming up against closed doors and obstacles that attempt to hinder your progress at almost every turn.** But, as you do, spare a thought for Tony Warriner. His teenage self may have created a beautifully complex, space-based adventure, yet he did so under a cloud. For not only was he fuming that his school had, in his own words, "conspired to block me from taking A-level Computer Studies", he was trying to navigate his way through his O-levels at South Hunsley in East Yorkshire. As you'd expect, he found his studies to be well and truly in the way of his coding endeavours.

Games had caught Tony's imagination like nothing else in his young life. He'd fallen in love with the Sinclair ZX81 – "a school friend had one and I remember it seemed to be magical" – and he had vowed to save up and buy one for himself. He never did because, as he was stashing his cash away, the ZX Spectrum was released and so he saved up for that instead. "And then I switched again to the Camputers Lynx which was the first computer I owned," he says of the 48K machine released in March 1983 for £225. He still has that computer but it wasn't the one which helped him make his name. That was the Amstrad CPC 464 and it was on this system – bought for him by his parents in the mid-Eighties – that he ended up creating *Obsidian*.

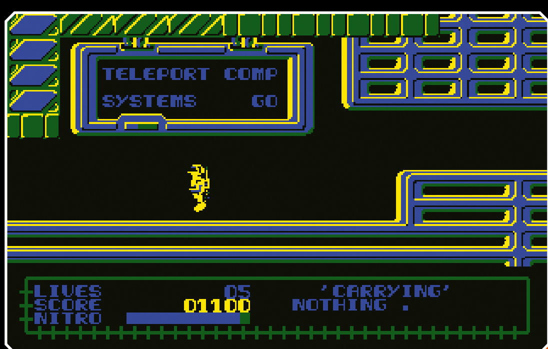



» [Amstrad CPC] Working out what an item is and where it needs to be used is one of the key gameplay mechanics of *Obsidian*.

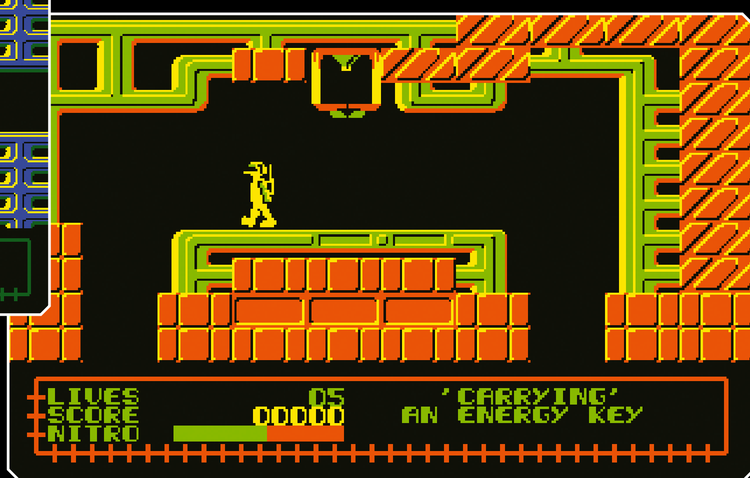
"I left school as soon as I could, which was at the age of 16," he says, telling us that he'd put revision on the backburner and failed his exams. Tony had felt games were the future and his heart was filled with hope. "I'd basically given up on school work two years previously. I just knew I could earn a living from games so it was a no-brainer for me. My parents reluctantly went along with the plan because they knew I was not going to put any effort into anything else. Anyway, they bought me the CPC, so it was partly their fault."

The more games Tony played, the more he developed a real taste for them. He liked adventures. "I absolutely loved all the Level 9 adventures," he remembers. "Not only were they superbly designed games, but also, technically, they were very advanced." He also found the titles by Gargoyle Games, such as *Tir Na Nog*, *Marsport* and *Dun Darach*, to be impressive. "Then there was at least two summers playing *Elite* on the C64, as well as all the Llamasoft games and *Paradroid*." He ended up developing a true soft spot for *Sorcery*, a game published by Virgin Games.

# DIAN




» [Amstrad CPC] Grab the teleport disc and place it here to ensure all systems are go.




» [Amstrad CPC] Tony created variety in the screens by distinguishing sections of the game with different colours.

"*Sorcery* was a seminal game from the era and a great achievement for the arcade-adventure genre," Tony says. "The overall concept of *Obsidian* was definitely inspired by this game."

Having soaked these experiences like a sponge, even though he felt overwhelmed by the games and how accomplished they were, Tony "tried to copy little bits from them all just to learn the trade, as it were". With *Obsidian*, his first decision was whether to base the game in space or deep within a warren of dungeons. "I decided to go with a more tech-based theme for the game because I also liked *Get Dexter*, which I consider to be one of the best games ever written for the CPC," he reveals. *Obsidian* ended up being set on a space station embedded within a massive asteroid.

**The idea was the craft was en route to its mother ship but to get there it had to make its way through the gravity well of a black hole.** Luckily, it had the protection of a gravity field but the power had been blown by a radiation storm, leaving the crew dangerously exposed. You assumed the role of the jet pack-wearing main character and you had to get stuck in trying to restore the power in order fire up the engines again and continue through the black hole without incident. From that point on, though, it was very much a case of Tony making things up as he went along.

"Believe me, there was never a map or a design. It was all stream-of-consciousness, seat-of-the-pants stuff," he admits. About the only thing Tony knew for certain was that it was going to be in the adventure genre ("I wanted *Obsidian* to pretty much fit how most of these games worked"). He also nailed down the basic method of how the game would play out: Find a key and use it to unblock something," he says. "I'd then build some gameplay and test it out. If it worked, it'd stay in and I'd map a bit more on the side of what I'd just done. It's not a bad way to work when it's not too expensive to produce the content that way. Most songs are written like that but modern-day multimillion dollar game productions most certainly aren't."

What emerged was a rather tricky game. Tony packed his space station to the rafters with reactivated anti-intruder security and there was a lot of ▶

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS**
**SYSTEM:** DOS, AMIGA, ATARI ST
**YEAR:** 1992

**BENEATH A STEEL SKY**
**SYSTEM:** DOS, AMIGA
**YEAR:** 1994

**BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS**
**SYSTEM:** WINDOWS, MAC OS, PLAYSTATION
**YEAR:** 1996

# MORE AMSTRAD EXCLUSIVES

**Don't want an Amstrad? Read this list and report back…**



### CROCO MAGNETO

■ Created in France and released into the public domain, *Croco Magneto* was slapped on to the covertape of issue 80 of *Amstrad Action*. It deserved its wider audience. Although simple – players controlled a constantly moving ball up and down across 24 screens in order to collect up to 96 blocks – it was highly polished and fiendishly addictive.

### SORCERY+



■ Tony Warriner took inspiration from *Sorcery* but we'd advise you try *Sorcery+* instead. Created for the disc-based CPCs, this superb adventure game pushed the tech boundaries of the computer, splitting the screen so that the game was in the lower-res yet colourful Mode 0 while the HUD was in the higher-res, four-colour Mode 1.



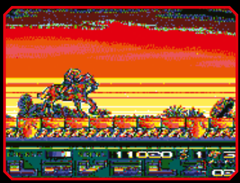
### GET DEXTER

■ Originally exclusive (before being ported to the Atari ST a year later in 1987), *Get Dexter* is often cited as the best Amstrad CPC game of all time. Developed in France (as *Crafton Et Xunk*), it was a hugely ambitious, colourful isometric adventure based on a sci-fi theme that was packed with puzzles and funny quirks.

### FLUFF

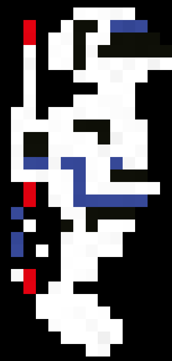


■ Created by the talented Rob Buckley for the Plus series of CPC computers, *Fluff* was a cute 1995 platformer which sought to be the Amstrad's equivalent of *Sonic*. It didn't quite achieve that (there was a lack of speed for starters) but the screens were busy and the enemies plentiful. Sadly, it sold catastrophic numbers.



### XYPHOES FANTASY

■ Produced in 1991, *Xyphoes Fantasy* has drawn comparisons with *Shadow Of The Beast*, not least because it's graphics and animation will cause your jaw to drop. Spread over a couple of discs and four lengthy levels, it used overscan screens, detailed sprites and ear-pleasing music while mixing shooting with sword fighting.



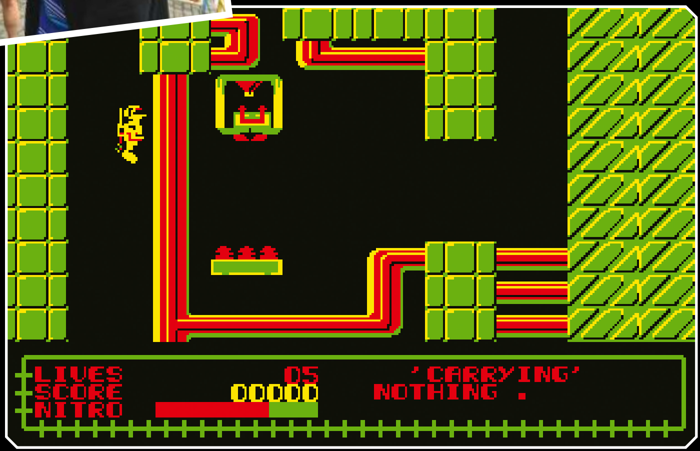
▶ back and forth trekking as you collected items from hanging gravity containers before using them to solve puzzles and open doors. The decision to steer away from a strictly linear path was a deliberate one. "I wanted the backtracking and the feel of the world expanding on multiple fronts simultaneously," Tony muses. But it meant players were stabbing in the dark, to an extent.

**That's because the puzzles, as we touched upon, revolved mainly around finding keys and passes and figuring what various objects did and where they should be taken.** This required lots of trial and error on the part of the player, as well as real brain power, since you were only able to carry one object at a time. "More than anything, this kept things nice and simple," explains Tony. "The simple swap of items was easy to program and to understand as a player."

To increase the challenge, the objects collected by the players were only identified after they had been gathered, adding to the feeling of intrigue and exploration. "I kind of liked the idea that you had to collect an item before you got the name. It doubled the reward, in a sense," Tony explains. "If it was labelled on the screen, you'd know as soon as you entered the location what was there. But having



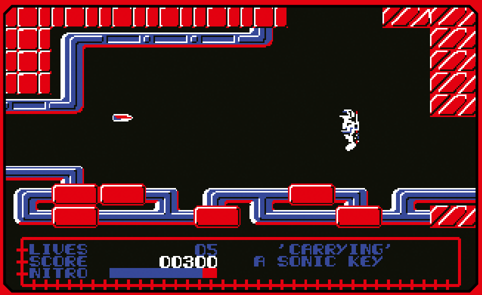
» After *Obsidian*, Tony made a name for himself with Charles Cecil and Revolution Software.




» [Amstrad CPC] There was no way for your character to shoot at enemies.

# SOLVING OBSIDIAN

**Our special playing tips will give you a helping hand**




■ Many parts of *Obsidian* require nerves of steel, good timing and a rapid response. Watching this enemy obstacle nip back and forth is quite hypnotic, but stick to the left-hand side and wait for the moment it starts to head right and make your move upwards. Done it? Phew!




■ Again, this is all about being patient but getting the timing just right. The idea is to hop onto that ledge while avoiding the nasty thing that is whizzing about the top of the screen. Don't be tempted to just fly left and up in one fell swoop because you'll inevitably cry at the loss of a life.




■ You may have thought there was nothing to see or do on the previous screen, but there actually was. That green block with the star in it? Fly up to it and you will be taken to another area of the game. Now it's time to fumble around for the teleport disc and then locate the teleport switch.

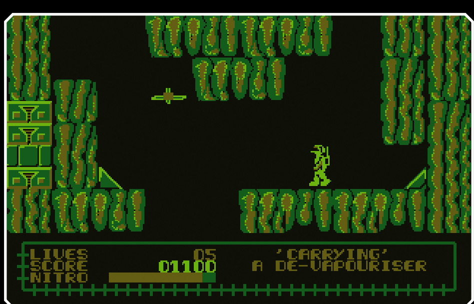
## "People have a low tolerance for hard controls today, at least compared to the Eighties"
Tony Warriner

picked it up, you could just swap it back again if it wasn't what you wanted."

All of this would have been easy enough if it wasn't for the many obstacles to contend with. Death was all-too-frequent and, to make matters worse for the player, there was no way to shoot at the enemies. "I probably decided against giving the character the ability to fire at the robots because the project was stretched as far as it could go already," Tony says. "I think another layer of complexity would have brought the whole thing down. It was all on a knife edge, to be quite honest."

Yet it worked. The fact you weren't blasting around the place kept you on your toes and made the game special. It didn't matter that the security droids were getting close to your ass or that laser beams were strewn across your path. You were an ordinary Joe, heart-in-mouth and bottom burning, carrying out your task in the most effective way you could think of.

Even so, trying to judge getting past a rapidly moving object in order to find an item and then easing past a second, third, fourth and maybe fifth time was no mean feat. It was made harder by a set of controls that were rather sensitive, something picked up on by reviewers. Tony defends them, to a degree. "I think they were okay for the time," he says. "Now I'd make the game far, far easier to control. People have a very low tolerance for hard controls today, at least compared to the Eighties."

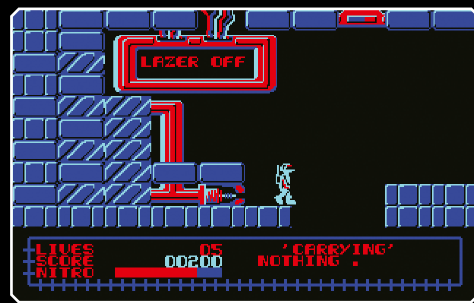



» [Amstrad CPC] By using the 320x200 pixel Mode 1 of the CPC, Tony was limited to four colours on each screen.

All of this resulted in a great loss of life, so many gamers tipped their hats to reader Tony Brown of Newport for a lovely, short type-in poke published in the July 1986 edition of *Amstrad Action* which granted them infinite lives – a massive relief from the built-in value of five. Those who didn't cheat found the game hard to complete – especially as they also had to contend with the frustration of the nitro fuel running out. Players would have to consider the location of the refuelling points. Figuring when to use your jet pack and when to leave it well alone, was also important to avoid risking an end-game.

**The idea was that, as a player, you'd draw a map as you explored, and on it you'd mark out the fuel points," says Tony.** "Then you'd need to be aware of what nitro you had remaining, compared to where you wanted to go. In a way, the placement of the recharging points gave you a clue, as presumably you could bank on the game being possible if you went the right way. It was deliberate." Thankfully, *Amstrad Action* printed a handy map packed with objects in February 1985 giving its readers a bit of a leg up. But there was no hat-tip for omitting to mark the nitros on this occasion – you'd still have to find them for yourself.

Still, gamers could console themselves that they were gazing at some fantastic graphics which Tony created himself. "I wrote an editor in BASIC that I used to plot all the pixels out. It was very crude and time consuming, but I didn't know of any alternative at the time," he says. Tony used the CPC's four-colour Mode 1. "It seemed like a slightly different way to go than the multicolour Mode 0 route that was more popular at the time. I figured that I had a unique look that I could actually draw, so it felt like the right thing to do." He drew a lot of visual inspiration from *Paradroid*.




» [Amstrad CPC] There was so much to think about in *Obsidian*, from deactivating lasers to collecting items.

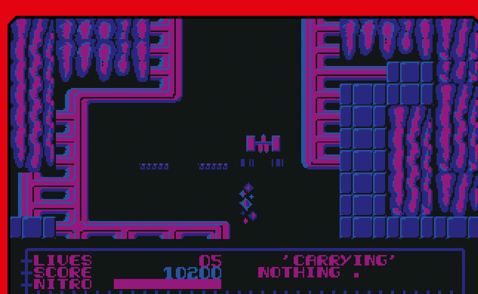
"The bas-relief look was inspired by this game," he says. "I remember being obsessed by the Braybrook Diaries in *Zzap!64* mag.

Less impressive was the limited sound, but Tony admits that it wasn't his forte. He describes it as both "programmer sound" and "functional", adding, "I had no one to help." Tony battled on, though, and six months of evening and weekend work ultimately paid off for the developer. He sent six or so demo tapes to various publishers, one of which was Artic Computer "which my mother found in the Hull telephone directory". Arctic boss Charles Cecil snapped it up and the team began refining it. "They kept breaking it which meant I had to fix the bugs and pop another cassette in the post – I was truly baffled that there might be bugs unbeknownst to me," Tony says.

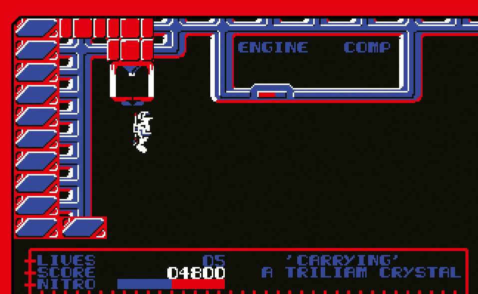
He remembers there being a big countdown to the asteroid self-destructing in the final phase of the game. "But they kept telling me it didn't work and I ended up stripping it out." Eventually, though, it was released as a CPC exclusive. "I think it's a real shame there was not a Spectrum version – I really regret never doing one," Tony rues. Not that it damaged his prospects. Sales may have been poor (his first royalty cheque was £60) but it got an AA Rave in *Amstrad Action* and landed him a job at Artic. Tony and Charles eventually joined forces and set up Revolution Software with Charles' then-girlfriend Noirin Carmody. Gaming really was to be his future. "Obsidian was the first game that I actually finished and which was good enough to be published," Tony finishes, modestly. *




■ You'll need the lock decoder here; you'll find it in the container to the left to access a crucial area of the game by dodging the spikes to the left as they move up and down. You'll have figured by now that timing is, again, key to a lot of the puzzles. The other tricky thing is figuring what unlocks what.




■ Now, imagine getting rather far into the game, knowing the end is in sight. You'll be on this screen thinking all you need to do is get past this moving object. But no, you die over and over again. There are frustrating bugs in the emulated game. Solve them entirely by playing the original on a CPC.




■ Certain objects activate particular functions, and the idea is figuring which ones will have the right effect. The Engine Comp here needs the Turbine Disc, for example, in order for it to be initialised. You can only carry one object at a time, so you need to go back and forth lots to gather the right items.

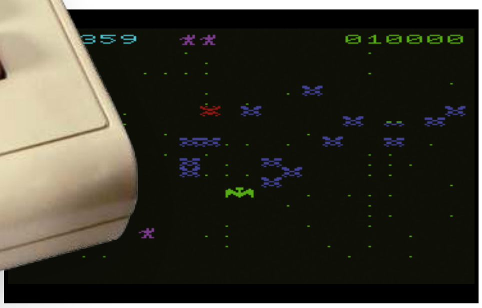
From the Archives

# TRO

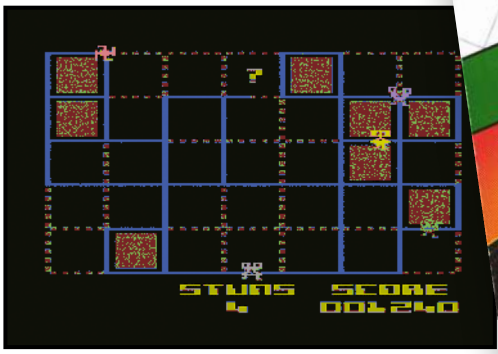
**When one of the most successful software distribution companies in North America decides to create its own videogames then success should be guaranteed, right? Kieren Hawken discovers why it wasn't as easy as Softsel and Tronix thought…**




**In the early Eighties, California-based Softsel had quickly become one of the leading software distribution companies in the whole of North America.** Jumping in while the market was hot and growing exponentially, it had rapidly become one of the most successful companies in its sector. But it was soon very clear that it couldn't manage this rapid growth without bringing in some more expertise, especially when the team was looking to expand into the fastest growing market of all: videogames. Softsel was run by two ex-employees of huge financial institution Citibank and it was a former colleague they turned to first. That man was John Reese and he explains how it all happened: "There were two guys who used to work with me and for me at Citibank by the name of Bob Leff and Dave Wagman, they had left about a year before I did and had started a company called Softsel. At this company, they created a new niche in the market as a software distributor. It spoke to small companies, and even individual people, who had created software and wanted to get it out on the market. Softsel would produce all the media and packaging for them and get these products into the local computer stores that were popping up everywhere. When I left Citibank I was trying



» [VIC-20] *Swarm!*, an interesting mix of both *Centipede* and *Galaxian*, was the first ever release on the Tronix label.




» [Atari 8-bit] *Kid Grid* is a hugely enjoyable *Amidar* clone that was also released for the Commodore 64.




to figure out what I was going to do next and Dave and Bob called me up and said, 'Hey, fancy doing some consulting for us?' They still felt that there were areas of the market that they hadn't yet exploited and knew that I was a guy who could spot these opportunities from when we worked together." So what made Softsel think that publishing its own software was the way forward? John goes into more detail, "At this time they had a thing called the hot list, which was basically a top 100 bestsellers, including games and productivity software, and Softsel were dominating that chart with their products. Things were really going gangbusters and they were one of the fastest growing companies in the US. The margins in this business were pretty small, but the volumes were high so there was actually plenty of scope to make a profit. At the time the biggest growing product was computer games, and I said, 'Why are you not taking advantage of this?' Commodore and Atari especially were leading the way and we were not doing anything for those formats. So I suggested we come up with our own product and they said, 'Yeah, go ahead, come up with some games,' I replied with, 'Me? I am not a games designer!'"

With the seed planted in John's head, his new employers wanted him to come up with a strategy that would work for the both of them and he soon had all the answers. "I just wanted to develop a home banking product, as that was my area of expertise," he says. "So I ended up creating a new company within Softsel which I then split into two brands: the first of these was Monogram, to create business software, and the second was Tronix, to create games." With John having no experience in gaming, it became a steep learning curve for him as he's quick to acknowledge. "The thing that was most interesting to me, as somebody who didn't know the games industry, was that because we (Softsel) had this huge distribution channel we ▶

## INSTANT EXPERT

- Tronix was the videogames division of leading North American software distributors Softsel.
- **The company is not to be confused with the short-lived Virgin Mastertronic label of the same name.**
- Its sister label Monogram published business and educational software programs.
- **Tronix only released games for the Commodore VIC-20, Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64 and IBM PC.**
- Many of its VIC-20 games were rereleased in the UK by Rabbit Software without permission of Tronix or Softsel.
- **Tronix published and/or distributed games for companies such as Don't Ask Software, Dragonfly, Infocom and Interesting Software.**
- It was one of the first software companies to realise that many people bought games on box art alone and capitalised on that.
- **Tronix was formed by former employees of huge US financial corporation Citibank.**
- Rather than copy leading arcade games outright, Tronix programmers were encouraged to try and improve them with new features.
- **Unlike many other companies of the time the company allowed its staff to work from either home or the office.**




# "I quickly learned that good art helped sell games" - John Reese






» [C64] Despite having exclusivity on the game, Tronix eventually turned down Jimmy Huey's platformer *Trolls And Tribulations*.

▶ would put tons of stock into stores. But this was on the back of an agreement that they could return any unsold stock during the next quarter. This was a real learning curve for me as I thought we were making millions of dollars but didn't count on large amounts of it coming back. Thankfully, I learned this quickly, unlike many other software companies of the time." As harsh a lesson as this was for John, he was more staggered by just how much work was involved in putting together the product in the first place. "Videogames wasn't my background, and nobody told me that it took around six to nine months to come up with a product! The holiday season was coming up, so I found some programmers and then hired some guys to do art and packaging." It would be the latter of these that John soon capitalised on to bring success to Tronix.

"One thing I quickly learned was that good art helped sell games," enthuses John, before adding, "in fact, I still have all the original artwork that Marc Eriksen did for us up on the walls in my games room at home. So every time I go in there for a game of pool, I look up and see the memories of those Tronix days and my first foray into videogames!" Marc Eriksen himself remembers the day he hooked up with Tronix well. "In September of 1982 I was contacted by Rich Taggart of a company called Tronix Publishing, a new game development group which was creating videogames for use on the Commodore 64 system," he says. "The C64 had been introduced in January 1982 by Commodore International at the Consumer Electronics Show that month, in Las Vegas, Nevada. I had begun to develop a reputation for creating effective colour box and sleeve art after working for the Carlston brothers at Brøderbund. Prior to that I had been freelancing illustration in the San Francisco Bay area, creating technical and advertising art for clients like Intel, Varian, Trans Pacific Airways, United Airlines, San Francisco

## MONETARY MONOGRAM

**The flipside of Tronix was Monogram, the label set up by Softsel to supply computer software for the business world. This was an area of expertise for Chairman John Reese as he had previously developed the very first computerised ATMs and home banking software while at Citibank. John explains to us why Monogram was his baby at Softsel, "Tronix were always a bit of a distraction for me sadly, I knew that Softsel could take advantage of this market and make a much larger profit than they could with just distributing them. It was always Monogram I was most interested in as that was my preferred field. Programs like Dollars And Sense were also much cheaper to make and they made much more money over a longer period of time, so this area was always my primary focus. Dollars And Sense was a great product too, I still knew people who were using it ten years later!"**




» *Monogram* was a big success and was set up by Softsel to supply computer software to the business world.

# DEFINING GAMES

**Tronix's artwork turned your head, but these were the games that held your attention**







### SIDEWINDER

COMMODORE VIC-20

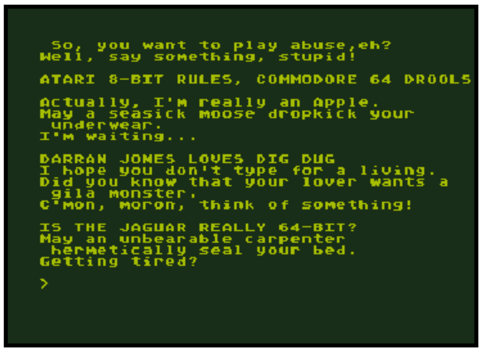
■ Creating a two-way horizontally scrolling *Defender*-style game on the VIC-20 in a very limited amount of memory was no mean feat, but somehow Tronix pulled it off with the excellent *Sidewinder*. It might have a fair bit of sprite flicker going on, but the speed is certainly impressive and it's also incredibly fun to play, which is what really counts. Programmer Jimmy Huey even included the now-famous scanner in the top-right of the screen to help track all the enemies. Tronix really squeezed the most out of Commodore's aging hardware with *Sidewinder* and it remains one of its most technically impressive releases.



### SUICIDE STRIKE

COMMODORE 64

■ The only game that Tronix released exclusively for the Commodore 64, *Suicide Strike* is an accomplished pseudo-3D shoot-'em-up that is slightly reminiscent of the Sega arcade game *Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom* with a few dollops of *Zaxxon* thrown in for good measure. This is because you also have to adjust the height of your craft to deal with the various land and air-based enemies as you fly over the planet surface. The handy status panel also helps you keep track of all these elements. *Suicide Strike* won't win any awards for its complexity, but it's a fun and entertaining blaster with some great visuals.




» [Atari 8-bit] *Abuse* was a rather unusual piece of software that saw you compete in a battle of insults with your computer!

Magazine and a broad array of other corporate, design, sports and editorial clients. Even while I was creating game art from 1982 to 2002, I was also doing mainstream commercial illustration." As this art became such an important part of the Tronix identity, we were intrigued to know more about the processes involved. "Tronix used to contact me from Ingleside in Southern California by phone and then explain the game to me," Mark informs us. "They would then send me some printed screenshots of the action by courier. In 1982 no one was communicating by email and all the art needed to be created in paint or pencil on paper or illustration board. I quickly drew some sketch possibilities and sent them to him by fax. This served us well, although we were restricted to only black-and-white imagery. Anything in colour needed to be sent for next-day delivery by messenger. My first piece was a game called *Swarm!*, created by a young developer called Jimmy Huey, who also created the games *Sidewinder* and *Galactic Blitz*, which I also did the art for." With all this in mind we were also interested to know how much Marc charged for his work. "In the beginning, the prices I charged for these new videogame clients, like Tronix, generally ran far less than I was receiving for my work with more established clients," he remembers. "But the work was so much fun that it was difficult to ignore. The average price for both Brøderbund and Tronix was around $500 per cover. As we neared the end of 1983, I had raised the price for a cover to around $1,000 per cover and by 1990 it was as much as $4,500 per piece!"

**Speaking of Jimmy Huey, he became Tronix's first hire in the programming department, but his route into the company wasn't very straight forward, as he tells us: "I was just a basement programmer as they called us, although in Los Angeles there are no basements!** I had saved up money to buy an Ohio Scientific computer and started making games for that machine, which I sold via mail order using small ads in *Micro Magazine*. It was a really obscure computer, that was probably only sold in the states. When the VIC-20 came out I went ahead and bought one of them and then decided to make some games for it. I programmed one game completely in the mini-assembler, but a friend of mine helped me set up a cross-development system using an Apple II, which I used from then on. We (Hal, Jim, Corey and I) were self-publishing our games under the moniker 'Interesting Software', advertising mainly through magazine ads. But we soon realised we had to find ourselves a proper distributor. Hal had a contact at Softsel, who, it turned out, had a subsidiary that was starting up called Tronix. So we signed a deal with them to publish our games and pay us royalties based on their sales, we were just looking for a distributor originally but ended up having Tronix publish the games for us instead." We were keen to find out exactly how this arrangement worked. "I continued working from home and was bouncing back and forth between my house in Los Angeles," Jimmy says, "which was only a couple of miles from Tronix's offices and Orange County where Jim and Hal also lived. Eventually I moved to Orange County ▶







### JUICE!

ATARI 8-BIT

■ Although *Juice!* was also released for the Commodore 64, Arti Haroutunian's Atari 8-bit version is the one to play, thanks to its slight improved visuals and faster speed. The game can best be described as a cross between *Q*bert* and *Pipe Mania* as you jump around the isometric grid trying to connect up the electrical circuit and not get zapped by the bad guys. As the levels progress the grids become more advanced and the enemies more vicious, so you need to be clever in the way you approach each one. A handy teleport on each side of the screen can also be used to get you out of trouble when needed.




### SCORPION

COMMODORE VIC-20

■ A *Gauntlet* clone on the VIC-20? If that doesn't surprise you enough, then also take into account that *Scorpion* predates Atari's game by two years! Although dungeon crawlers were around well before *Gauntlet* there are few as accomplished as this on such limited hardware. In *Scorpion* you make your way around the maze-like levels, collecting the eggs and defeating the enemies. There are frogs, snakes, lizards and even giant centipedes standing in your way. Add in a selectable difficulty level, too, and you have a real challenge on your hands with *Scorpion*. This is another great piece of VIC-20 coding by Jimmy Huey.

## TIMELINE

**1981**

■ Softsel Products Inc. is formed in Inglewood, California to distribute a wide range of software products across North America.

**1982**

■ **Deciding to also develop its own products, Softsel creates two new labels in Tronix, for videogames, and Monogram, for more 'serious' computer software.**

■ Tronix releases its first videogame – *Swarm!* for the Commodore VIC-20.

**1983**

■ **Two new formats are added to the Tronix portfolio – Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit.**

■ The videogame crash hits Tronix hard and it decides to concentrate on publishing other companys' products with less risk involved.

**1984**

■ **Tronix publishes innovative educational game *Chatterbee* that teaches children to both spell and pronounce words properly.**

■ Tronix signs an exclusive contract to distribute Infocom adventure games in North America.

**1985**

■ **The new owners of Tronix decide to concentrate purely on the sales of legacy products and distribution.**

**1986**

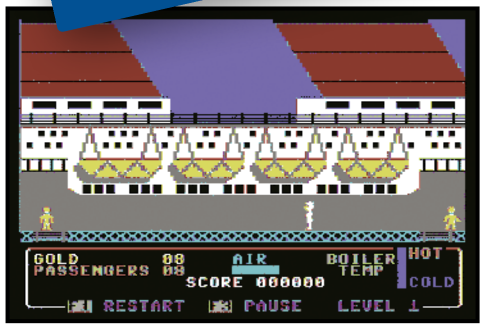
■ After the move away from producing videogames proves to be less than successful the company is suddenly shut down and disappears.






too, which made things even easier. I did everything in the game back then including the graphics. I'm not an artist, but the art was simple enough back then, so I was able to get by sufficiently." Luckily, finding the programmers and games Tronix needed wasn't as hard as John initially feared. "It was quite easy to find games to publish on the Tronix label as Softsel already all these people who were sending in products for us to distribute, so instead of just distributing these products we offered them a lump sum to buy the program and publish under the Tronix label. I didn't concentrate much on the quality of the games or the technicalities of them, I was focused on finding people who could supply them and people who could create the packing for me so it looked great on the shelf."

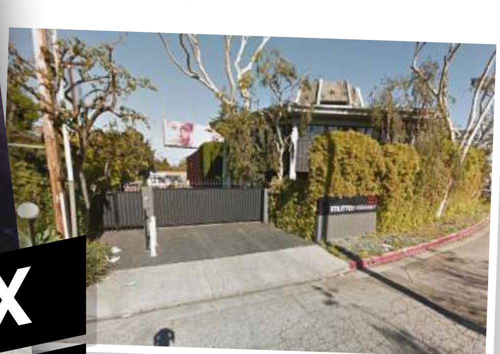
Tronix was ticking along nicely, John had a great team in place and the steady flow of games was keeping the company in profit. But it wasn't that long before some creases started to appear in the fabric as the various people within the company had different ideas about how to move forward. John laments to us about his acrimonious departure from Tronix and what led up to it, "Softsel were doing so well that they decided to become a listed company. The problem was that, even though both Monogram and Tronix were doing really well, the new investors didn't see a future in the company creating its own software, so quickly decided that this division should be sold off. Unfortunately, I didn't see eye to eye with the new owners, we just couldn't agree how to take the company forward and increase growth. They went through about five different chairmen after me, but none of them lasted long, and within a couple of years they were gone from the market completely." But John wasn't the only one who was in disagreement with his bosses at Tronix. Star programmer Jimmy Huey also had his eyes on different avenues as he wistfully explains, "Tronix were moving full steam ahead into making C64 and Atari games so John was pushing me to put out a C64 game for him instead of VIC-20. But I got it in my head that I wanted to develop an Apple II game instead. John thought it was a horrible idea and, in retrospect, he was totally right! So I spent probably the better part of six to eight months working on an Apple II title without a publisher! I eventually did get it published through a company called H.A.L. Labs, not the well-known one but a smaller, local company. I never made much money on it, though, and by the time I got around to doing a C64 game John was already gone. Tronix had a first right of refusal on all my games for a certain amount of time, they had obviously passed on my Apple II game, and then declined my first C64 game too, which later became *Trolls And Tribulations* by Creative Software."



» [C64] Platformer *Waterline* was the very last game to be published under the Tronix label in 1984.

**Even though Tronix's life proved to be fairly short there were still plenty of great stories that came out of the team's exploits.** John is particularly proud of one of them, and eager to tell us about it. "The one story I really remember from that time was when Steve Jobs over at Apple had come up with a new computer called the Macintosh," he smiles. "We were all very interested in this new computer and managed to be one of the very first companies to get some decent software onto it. Many people still say that we helped create the so-called Apple evangelists of today, which started back then with the Mac." Jimmy's first story is pretty shocking and he still can't believe it to this day. "As I said previously my friends and I were selling our games mail-order but, unbeknownst to us, Rabbit Software had become our UK distributor," he says. "I guess their modus operandi was to just pirate other folks' games. We only found out they were doing this when we connected with Softsel to see if they could distribute our games. As it turned out they were starting





» The former home of Tronix – 5231 West 83rd Street in Los Angeles, California.

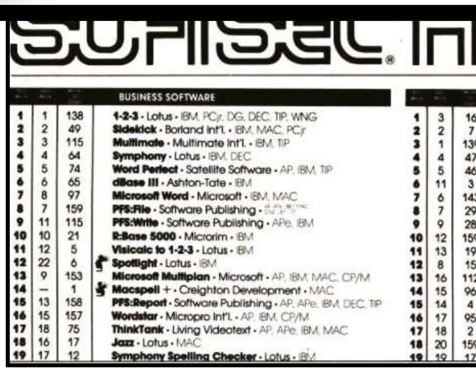
## DNA OF TRONIX

### The aspects that made the publisher stand out from the crowd



#### WORKS OF ART

■ Without doubt one of the most striking things about Tronix's games is its box art. The man responsible, Mark Eriksen, says that he often quoted lower fees than usual for making them because he just loved working on them so much. That love and affection for the product really shines through in the design and execution.



SOFTSEL
BUSINESS SOFTWARE

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 138 | **1-2-3** · Lotus · IBM, PCjr, DG, DEC, TIP, WNG | 1 | 3 | 16 |
| 2 | 2 | 49 | **Sidekick** · Borland Int'l. · IBM, MAC, PCjr | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| 3 | 3 | 115 | **Multimate** · Multimate Int'l. · IBM, TIP | 3 | 1 | 13 |
| 4 | 4 | 64 | **Symphony** · Lotus · IBM, DEC | 4 | 4 | 47 |
| 5 | 5 | 74 | **Word Perfect** · Satellite Software · AP, IBM, TIP | 5 | 5 | 46 |
| 6 | 6 | 65 | **dBase III** · Ashton-Tate · IBM | 6 | 11 | 3 |
| 7 | 8 | 97 | **Microsoft Word** · Microsoft · IBM, MAC | 7 | 6 | 14 |
| 8 | 7 | 159 | **PFS:File** · Software Publishing · [illegible] | 8 | 7 | 29 |
| 9 | 11 | 115 | **PFS:Write** · Software Publishing · APe, IBM | 9 | 9 | 28 |
| 10 | 10 | 21 | **R:Base 5000** · Microrim · IBM | 10 | 12 | 15 |
| 11 | 12 | 5 | **Visicalc to 1-2-3** · Lotus · IBM | 11 | 13 | 19 |
| 12 | 22 | 6 | **Spotlight** · Lotus · IBM | 12 | 8 | 15 |
| 13 | 9 | 153 | **Microsoft Multiplan** · Microsoft · AP, IBM, MAC, CP/M | 13 | 16 | 11 |
| 14 | — | 1 | **Macspell +** · Creighton Development · MAC | 14 | 15 | 96 |
| 15 | 13 | 158 | **PFS:Report** · Software Publishing · AP, APe, IBM, DEC, TIP | 15 | 14 | 4 |
| 16 | 15 | 157 | **Wordstar** · Micropro Int'l. · AP, IBM, CP/M | 16 | 17 | 95 |
| 17 | 18 | 75 | **ThinkTank** · Living Videotext · AP, APe, IBM, MAC | 17 | 18 | 2 |
| 18 | 16 | 17 | **Jazz** · Lotus · MAC | 18 | 20 | 15 |
| 19 | 17 | 12 | **Symphony Spelling Checker** · Lotus · IBM | 19 | 19 | 17 |

#### PUBLISHING POWER

■ Being part of a huge software publisher such as Softsel benefitted Tronix greatly. This meant that it was easy for the team to get its games into all the big stores and also attract the highest calibre of staff. With Softsel's products constantly topping the charts ahead of its many rivals, Tronix was almost guaranteed to make money.




#### BUSINESS OR PLEASURE?

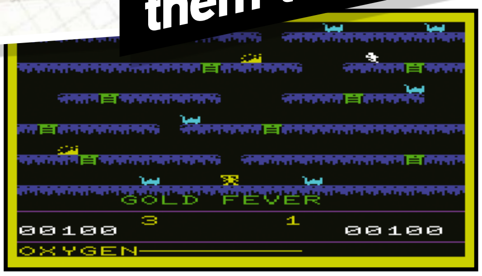
■ Tronix's owner, Softsel, was clever in creating separate divisions to take care of the two sides of the software industry – business and pleasure. There was Tronix to supply videogames and Monogram to supply business and educational software. Each label also had its own very distinct identity and branding.






» Tronix constantly advertised in magazines in order to show off its latest releases.

**"They went through about five chairmen after me, but none of them lasted long"** - John Reese




» [VIC-20] *Gold Fever* is a fun platformer for the VIC-20 inspired by titles such as *Miner 2049'er* and *Lode Runner.*

up Tronix and they mentioned to us they saw our games in the UK. I guess the owner of Rabbit knew he was in trouble. He flew out immediately and pleaded ignorance and agreed to stop selling the games! A good way to make money, I guess." Jimmy's Tronix days actually seem to be totally caught up in controversy as he also offered up this zinger: "I remember we all made quite a bit of money on the first three cassette games and we quibbled a lot over the royalties. In retrospect, the royalty percentage was extremely high and John's argument was that they were taking all the risks in advertising and publishing and so on. But on the second set of games, which were cartridge-based, they came out around the time of the videogame crash and we ended up getting a bill from Tronix! I wasn't sure if it was an accounting thing or if they were serious about collecting on it but we just totally ignored them!"

**With many of these companies that we cover in Retro Gamer it's often all about the lasting legacy they left behind.** While the legacy of Tronix is far from substantial, John's own feelings when looking back are quite personal. "Although many of our games were copies of the more famous ones of the time, I always felt that we improved them in some way," he says. "*Kid Grid* had to be my favourite game and it sold really well too. *Juiced* was also very fun, so I played that one a lot too. I thought the Atari computers, in particular, were brilliant, in fact for their time they were remarkable. At my current company, Parchment, we actually have a games room which includes a couple of those original Atari computers, along with some of those games we published, and all the kids really love playing on them when they come in!" Jimmy's own memory of days gone by at Tronix are quite sorrowful, "I sort of regret not hanging out there more. I have always been an introvert and I think that at the time I valued just working on my own more than being part of a team, as I did later on in my career. I honestly can't believe people are even interested what we did back then and even more surprised that anyone remembers us!" Tronix might not have been much more than a small blip on the radar, but they still provided plenty of fun times for many people in the earlier days of home computer games. ✱

**Special thanks to John Reese, Jimmy Huey and Marc Eriksen.**

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



### JOHN REESE

■ Since stepping down as chairman of Tronix, John has worked in a number of different roles within the educational and business software industry. After a four-year period doing consulting work, John took up the position of President at TRW Financial Systems where he stayed for four years before moving on to become the CEO and founder of iSearch, a leading supplier of recruitment tools. Then, in 2003, he formed Docufile, which later became known as Parchment, a company that transformed the management of education credentials and manuscripts. While he took up the role of Director at several educational institutions, he still remains CEO of Parchment to this day.



### JIMMY HUEY

■ Since working for Tronix Jimmy has continued to work in the games industry for some very big players. Starting with a four-year stint at Epyx, Jimmy then went on to work for developers such as Disney Interactive, Way Forward and Temboo. Perhaps his most famous contribution to videogames was his involvement in the hugely popular *Shantae* series, a franchise that is still going to this very day. Jimmy now works as freelance programmer and games designer and spends much of his time over here in the UK.



### MARC ERIKSEN

■ Very little has changed over the years for Mark. He is still creating a wide range of original art for just about every type of company you can think of. Although he no longer creates artwork for videogames he still regularly attends conventions in the US where he sells full-size signed editions of his pieces and tells some tales of his days in the games industry. You can find a full portfolio of Marc's extensive range of artwork, including game boxes for companies, such as SNK, Tengen and Brøderbund, over at his website, marcericksen.com.



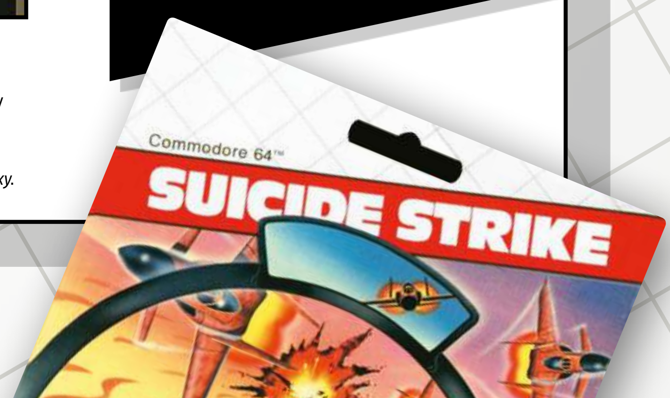
### FORMAT FOCUS

■ While many software publishers out there were trying to support as many formats as possible in order to hedge their bets and see where the money was, Tronix took a more focused approached and concentrated on the formats it knew would be successful. This is why it only released games for a small selection of computers.




### ADVENTURE TIME

■ One of the cleverest moves of Tronix and its parent company, Softsel, was picking up the publishing rights to Infocom's hugely popular range of adventure games. This saw Tronix market and distribute such popular titles as the *Zork* series, *Deadline*, *Spellbreaker*, *Wishbringer* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy.*



# Control Stick

**» PLATFORM:** MASTER SYSTEM **» RELEASED:** 1987 **» COST:** £14.95 (LAUNCH), £10+ (TODAY)

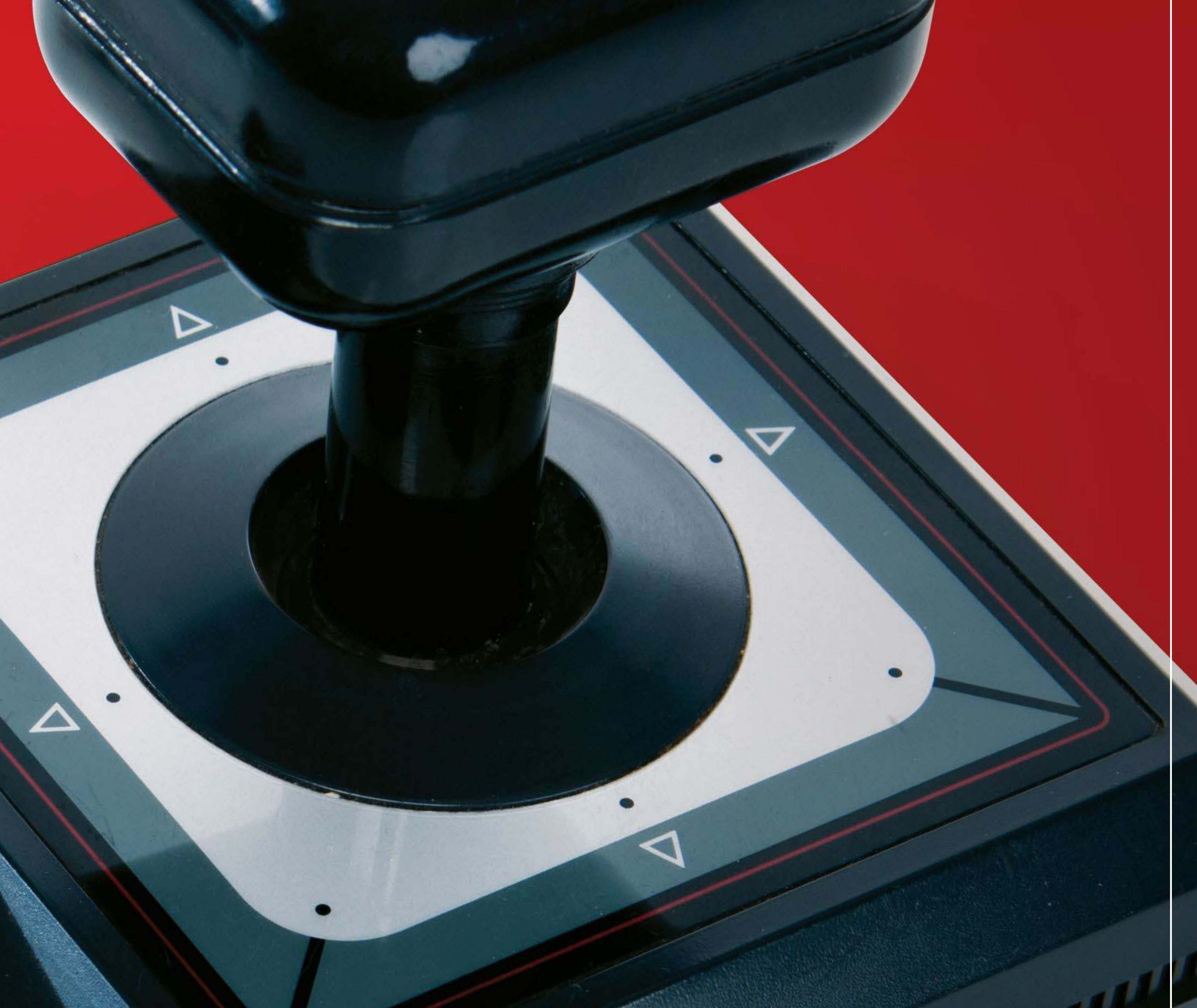
As a major manufacturer of arcade games for the whole of its history, it should come as no surprise that Sega would introduce an arcade-style joystick for any of its home consoles. What *is* surprising is this Master System controller, which broke convention in a number of ways. At the time, most joysticks used either the classic ball-top design that's common in Japan, a straighter stick as was more common in the West, or a flight-style design with integrated trigger-style buttons. Sega opted for none of these, instead employing a unique, but somewhat unwieldy, T-grip design with a large cuboid top.

However, the bigger and more obvious break with convention is Sega's choice to place the buttons to the left of the stick. While it might be a boon to left-handed players, it's a totally bizarre design choice which was almost never replicated. In fact, the only other controller we can think of that did this was the Sega Sports Pad, a Master System trackball peripheral which was discontinued after a short time. A more traditional successor called the Arcade Command Stick was advertised in 1988 but ultimately never released, and future Sega arcade sticks would all use more traditional parts and layouts. *

## Control Stick Fact

■ Unusually, some boxes for this peripheral advertise its compatibility with a number of non-Sega consoles and home computers, including the Atari 2600, Commodore 64 and more.





## ESSENTIAL GAME Bubble Bobble

The Master System is well-served with arcade conversions and arcade-styled games, so in truth, most of the console's library would work well here. However, we've got a soft spot for Taito's excellent conversion of the classic platformer *Bubble Bobble*, which feels pretty good to play on the stick. This conversion is very faithful to the arcade original, with graphics and sound that are as close as possible on Sega's 8-bit hardware. It also added new secret rooms, new items and extra boss fights, giving it something unique to boast of when compared to other conversions.



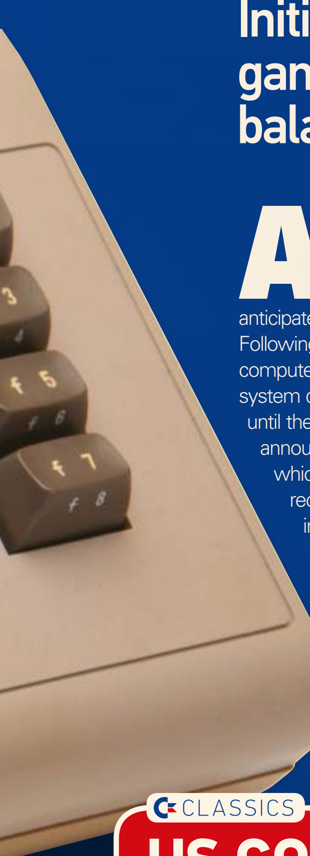
# 35 YEARS OF THE
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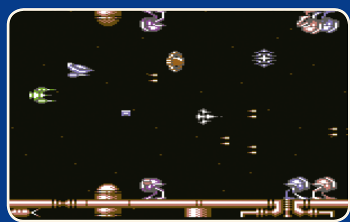


# odore 64



**Initially marketed to businesses, the C64 was soon embraced by gamers. Rory Milne learns how impressive support chips and a balanced design have enabled 35 years of C64 gaming**

**As late as December 1981, the Commodore 64 was top-secret.** But details leaked to the US computer press in very early 1982, making the C64's arrival a hotly anticipated event even before its official announcement. Following a January 1982 launch, the C64 hit US computer specialist stores in September, but the system didn't reach mainstream American retail outlets until the following year. In the UK, Commodore similarly announced a release date of September 1982, which was delayed, and so British retailers didn't receive any C64s until November. Even then, an intimidating price tag of £299 plus VAT meant that the system was not immediately bought for gaming, as Graftgold boss Steve Turner points out. "It was relatively expensive when it first came out, but it was a lovely machine – so well built, a proper keyboard. But they were selling it as a business computer at a business price, so who was going to buy it for games?"



» [C64] Blasting through a tight spot in Cyberdyne Systems' superlative shooter *Armalyte*.




» [C64] As C64 arcade ports go, they don't get much better than Elite's *Buggy Boy*.

Even so, just as the Commodore 64 had trickled through to UK owners in late 1982, C64 games began to slowly appear in early 1983, although many were far from original, which System 3 supremo Mark Cale puts down to a developer learning curve. "The hardest thing you have to do to make a game great is to make [it] playable. When people were copying an arcade game, there was already a basis of a design that had worked out and had proven popular. And when the imagery was similar, developers knew consumers would resonate with it." Acclaimed coder Andrew Braybrook views the influence of arcades on early C64 games as being driven by the tastes of gamers, and offers a couple of reasons for the short-lived nature of the coin-op clone era. "The arcades were many programmers' inspiration, and it's a safe bet that many players would like arcade clones on their C64s. Of course, there was the matter of copyright, which probably brought that to a halt, as well as arcade hardware developing at a faster rate."

By mid-1983, price cuts had left the C64 costing £199 and $199 in the UK and US respectively.

CLASSICS

## US GOLD

**The American-import specialist that lived up to its name**



### DROPZONE

■ Although US Gold sourced many of its releases from the States, one early exception was Archer MacLean's seminal shooter *Dropzone*. This *Defender* tribute improves on the minimalist visuals of its inspiration while also building on *Defender*'s gameplay. Specifically, the lightning-fast horizontal movements of *Dropzone*'s jet-packed hero are governed by gravity, making the rescue and safe return of scientists to their base – the Dropzone – and blasting their alien aggressors that bit more difficult.

### IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

■ Describing *Impossible Mission* simply as a platformer would be doing it an injustice. That said, the platforming in Epyx's classic is superlative, with jumps that require careful rather than perfect positioning and deadly robots that act with disarming intelligence. Besides platforms, the game also requires the collection of password pieces, which are found through time-consuming searches of objects conducted while dodging droids. Epyx's spy title also boasts slick animation and highly effective use of speech.





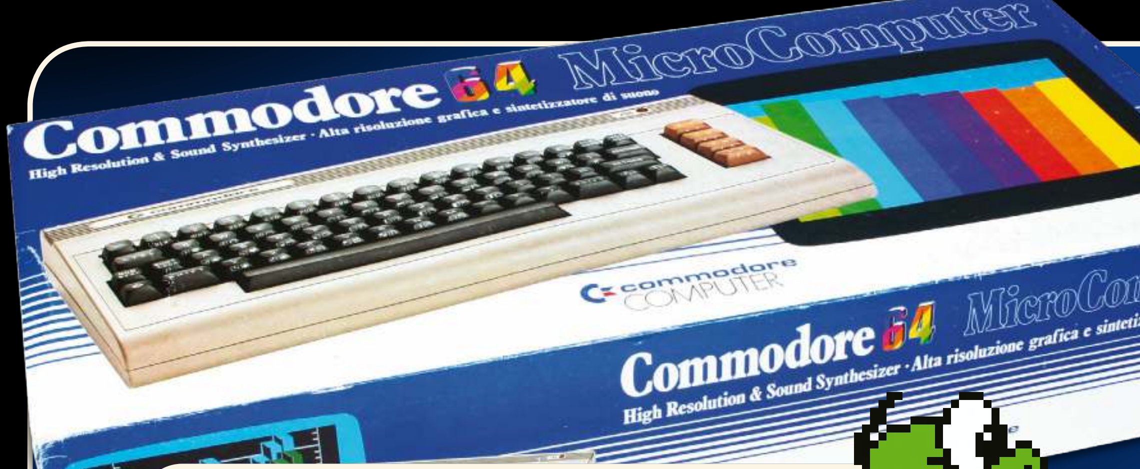

### CALIFORNIA GAMES

■ Arguably the zenith of Epyx's 'Games' series, *California Games* is definitely the coolest of the firm's memorable sports titles. None of the game's challenges are traditionally recognised sports, but that's really the title's selling point. Admittedly, its events sound laid-back, but the skateboarding, roller-skating, BMX, surfing, footbag and frisbee challenges actually have very stiff learning curves. The game's appeal lies in the fact that its difficulty is evenly matched by the satisfaction gained from mastering it.

### BEACH-HEAD II

■ Successor to one of US Gold's earliest imports, *Beach-Head II* takes its predecessor's minigame formula and adds a simultaneous two-player option. Even in its solo mode, however, the follow-up vastly improves on part one's visuals and gameplay. This second aspect is particularly welcome, as it's an area where the original disappoints. *Beach-Head II*'s initial stages see each side taking turns with a powerful machine gun before settling their differences with a top-down helicopter shoot-out and a knife fight.









» [C64] Tony Crowther created many great C64 games, such as his puzzle title *Bombuzal.*



# THE SOFTWARE HOUSE

**Graftgold boss Steve Turner on the highs and lows of C64 development**



**How soon after the release of the C64 did you become aware of the system?**

We had exposure fairly early on. I can remember watching *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* on it, and thinking: 'Wow – this machine can really do things.' I think Andrew Braybrook was sold on the C64 right from the beginning, so it seemed like quite a natural thing for him to progress on to it, seeing as the Dragon wasn't selling anything at all.

**Why did ST Software not develop C64 games sooner?**

At first, we kind of got our cues from Hewson, and I don't think he had released anything on the C64. But the sales of the Dragon titles were literally in hundreds, so it just wasn't sustainable. We only really got into the C64 after seeing the machine for ourselves and thinking: 'Right, this is the one to do.'

**Why do you think Graftgold's original C64 games were better received than its conversions?**

The only games we had to convert were my Spectrum titles, and we only did one ourselves – *[3D] Lunattack* – and Andrew found it just wasn't using the C64 at its best. When I did *Ranarama*, I didn't conceive of it on other machines. It was Hewson that came to me; he had Gary Foreman's number. So Gary did that. The only game I tried to design for the two machines was *Magnetron.* I wasn't happy really with either version.

**How did sales of Graftgold's C64 games compare to those for other computers?**

The sales of Andrew's games just blew the stuff that I'd done on the Spectrum out of the water. *Paradroid* and *Uridium* suddenly went to around the 50,000 sales-mark, and probably past that. *Alleykat* was the first title that was specifically done for America. It didn't translate into millions of sales, though.

**What would you attribute the C64's long-term popularity to?**

When its price came down, it was really good value. It had a good set of support chips on it; that's what gave it the edge, and that's what kept it alive for so long. By the time the Amiga appeared, we were using PCs and a developers kit, which made developing for the C64 really easy. The 16-bits were a lot more of an investment.

Meanwhile, Commodore reassessed developing coin-op knock-offs after a *Pac-man* clone led to a legal spat with Atari. However, rather than looking for alternative inspiration, those developing games for the now competitively priced C64 instead began to work out what made certain arcade games popular. As specific mechanics and gameplay elements were identified, gaming genres were defined, with the result that far more original C64 games began to appear. By mid-1984, this trend was becoming the norm, as System 3's Mark Cale explains. "If you look at *Track & Field* in the arcades, and then you look at *Summer Games*, Epyx took their game in different directions. The same way that you got films with a similar theme, you got games with a similar theme. Like the idea of wiggling a joystick – which is what Epyx did. *Dropzone* clearly had *Defender* as its influence, but it's still a fantastic game – Archer [MacLean] never got sued. It was sufficiently different but still a great game. So being influenced by arcade games didn't necessarily mean a bad product. Genres were being created, and arcades were the guiding direction because the hardware was bespoke and far more powerful than computers."

Following the evolution that Commodore 64 games had undergone in the first half of 1984, C64 gaming experienced a revolution in the year's second half, in which the originality and production values of titles shot up. Artist Paul 'Dokk' Docherty wasn't yet professionally designing game graphics at this point, but he clearly remembers the industry moving up a gear. "Before, there were classic games like *H.E.R.O.*, which didn't look like much but were amazing to play. Now the C64 games



CLASSICS

# FIRST STAR SOFTWARE

**The US franchise-builders whose games shone on the C64**



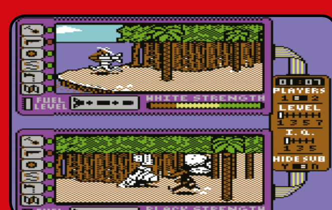
## SPY VS SPY

■ The pinnacle of competitive two-player C64 gaming, although *Spy Vs Spy's* devious CPU opponent makes its comedic espionage an equally compelling solo experience. The game combines arcade action with strategy by equipping two spies with booby traps and tasking them with collecting the same objects before making their escape. A split-screen playfield allows them to fight and monitor each other's actions, which often go unnoticed and leave one competitor frustrated to the delight of his rival.

## BOULDER DASH

■ Although originally an Atari 8-bit title, *Boulder Dash* was a revelation on the C64. Taking its lead from arcade classics like *Dig Dug* and *Mr Do*, *Boulder Dash* vastly improves on the size and sophistication of those single-screen efforts by adding multidirectional scrolling and fresh mechanics – such as transforming enemies and boulders into collectibles. Like its inspirations, First Star's game combines digging for treasure with avoiding hazards, but scale and innovation take *Boulder Dash* to another level.





## SPY VS SPY: THE ISLAND CAPER

■ On first inspection, *The Island Caper* looks similar to its predecessor: both games share the same combat system, almost identical character sprites and interchangeable objectives. But it's in its differences where *Spy Vs Spy II* shines. The sequel gives each spy a fresh suite of dastardly traps and the challenge of swimming through shark-infested waters between different islands, and replaces the original's flick-screen offices with a playfield of scrolling island terrains.

## BOULDER DASH III

■ *Rockford's Riot* received criticism for being identical to *Boulder Dash*, and so First Star gave this second sequel bas-relief graphics and a revamped storyline. Rockford is now mining in space, and his adversaries are extra-terrestrial mouths and eyes instead of fireflies and butterflies. Ultimately, though, *Boulder Dash's* core structure couldn't be radically changed without breaking it, and so First Star largely left it untouched with the result that *Boulder Dash III* retains the original's compelling gameplay.





» [C64] Archer Maclean's *IK+* topped its predecessor by adding an extra combatant and new moves.



business was shifting from bedroom hackers to a more professional business that cared about presentation."

As the quality of games available for the Commodore 64 improved and the quantity of games being produced for the system increased, so did coverage of the C64 in computer magazines. This didn't go unnoticed by games developers who had previously been wary of backing the Commodore 64 given the numerous home computers on the market and the reality that they weren't all going to be successful. Steve Turner of Graftgold cites intuition as being the deciding factor for his firm getting into C64 games development. "We looked through the magazines and saw that the C64 was getting a big splash, and you kind of got the feeling then that the time was right for it. The trouble was in those days that there were so many machines appearing that you just didn't know which one was going to take off. Then all of a sudden the C64 had full-page adverts and you started seeing it in the shops. It was at that moment we thought: 'Right, this is really going to sell. There's going to be a market for it.'"

**The Commodore 64 games magazine *Zzap!64* hadn't yet launched in late 1984, but when looking back, it's clear to ex-*Zzap!64* reviewer and editor Jaz Rignall how innovative the C64 gaming that was emerging in this period was in comparison to what had come before.** "There was a lot of more original stuff. People like Jeff Minter were producing very interesting games, some based on arcade games. Then you had companies like US Gold bringing over really interesting original titles from America, like *Beach-Head*, and things like that." As for why developers were now producing C64 titles with more sophisticated gameplay than could be found in

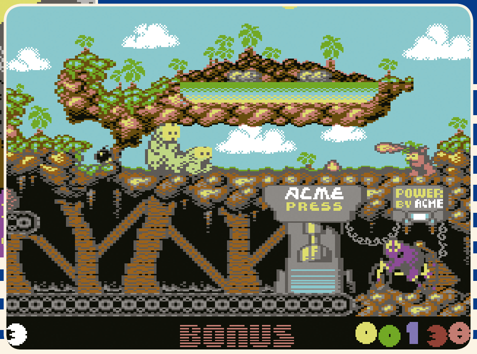
> **"I finally got the chance to play the C64 – it just absolutely blew me away"**
> Jaz Rignall

the arcades that had defined the genres that computer gaming was building on, Jaz points to coders' growing familiarity with Commodore's system. "I think you just had people beginning to get to grips with programming the machine and getting a little bit more ambitious with their efforts. So you got to see games like *Raid Over Moscow* and *Son Of Blagger*. I think some of that was just people trying something different and wanting to break out of that sort of platform/shoot-'em-up saturation point that the C64 had reached."

By the early months of 1985, a critical mass of C64s had been sold, and the result was a steady stream of top-notch games. During that spring, a magazine specifically focused on C64 gaming was launched. Atari 400 gamer Jaz Rignall was recruited as one of *Zzap!64*'s first reviewers, and he has fond memories of catching up with the year's best C64 releases during his induction. "It wasn't until I joined *Zzap!64* that I finally got the chance to play the C64 – it just absolutely blew me away. Fortunately, *Zzap* had a huge back-catalogue from *Personal Computer Games* magazine, so I got to play virtually every contemporary C64 game. It was an absolutely amazing experience; games like *Boulder Dash*, *Impossible Mission*, *Decathlon* and *Ghostbusters*. We would work during the day, and then Gary Penn and



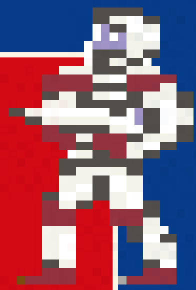
» [C64] Battle commences in *Barbarian II* – Palace Software's gory hack-'n'-slash sequel.



» [C64] *Creatures 2* by the Rowlands brothers is highly compelling and deeply challenging.

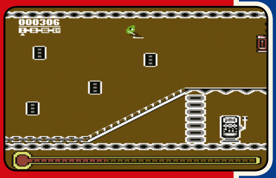
CLASSICS

## GREMLIN GRAPHICS



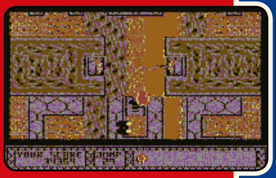
**The producer of a wealth of characters and novel games**

### THING ON A SPRING



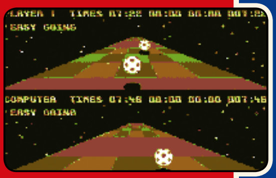
■ Thing may not be as fondly remembered as Monty Mole, but the spring-loaded hero's debut is every bit as good as his label-mate's platformers. Gremlin's C64 original involves relatively straightforward but demanding gameplay, where Thing's bouncing is more of a visual than a mechanic. There are numerous pitfalls, however: switches that have to be triggered in order to overcome certain obstacles, and extensive back-tracking as Thing attempts to assemble nine jigsaw pieces and confront the game's antagonist.

### BOUNDER



■ A complete reinvention of the platformer, *Bounder* typifies the novelty that defined Gremlin's C64 output. The game displays a disorienting aerial view of its playfield and features a bouncing tennis ball as its hero. Deadly aliens obstruct his progress, and jumps that fall short of platforms prove fatal. Additionally, some platforms act as catapults and teleports, but others cost a life if landed on. All of this is worth enduring, however, as *Bounder*'s superlative gameplay rewards perseverance.

### TRAILBLAZER



■ While in some ways a spiritual sequel to *Bounder* – both games have chequered playfields with missing and interactive squares – in most respects *Trailblazer* is a true original that defies classification. Essentially a straight lane into-the-screen racer, *Trailblazer* requires its spherical contestants to jump gaps, travel over tiles containing power-ups and avoid ones that reverse their controls or contain other penalties. Although not a C64 original, the Commodore 64 *Trailblazer* is arguably the definitive version.

### COSMIC CAUSEWAY



■ Shaun Southern's *Trailblazer* follow-up was a C64 exclusive, which was probably wise given that the game played to the strengths of the system's graphic hardware configuration. Beyond simply being far faster than its predecessor – which takes their shared visual effect from abstract to geometric overload – *Cosmic Causeway* adds shoot-outs with opponents to the established gameplay. The trade-off is the loss of part one's simultaneous two-player races, but *Causeway*'s deeper gameplay more than compensates for this.

# THE CODER / DESIGNER

**Legendary games developer Andrew Braybrook remembers the C64**



**What were your earliest impressions of the C64?**

At the time, we had a ZX81, so the C64 was clearly more solid and professional-looking. The C64 had a floppy disk drive available too, and the games we were playing were good. Plus, the Programmer's Reference Guide provided all the info we needed. At the same time, I could see that some other games could do with a bit of polish. This gave me the confidence to take the career change from COBOL programmer to games.

**How did you feel about initially developing Spectrum conversions instead of original C64 titles?**

I was quite happy doing conversions to the Dragon 32 because there was a lot of learning to do. I had to learn assembler, the hardware and how a game was put together. When I converted *[3D] Lunattack* to the C64, I could see that I wasn't using its strengths. I suggested a few new features that would give the game a bit more depth, and used the hardware sprites where I could, and that made me hungry to use the C64's hardware features.

**What was your reasoning for making *Gribbly's Day Out* so original when many successful earlier C64 games had been coin-op clones?**

I was trying to use as many C64 hardware features as possible, and almost carve a game out of that. *Gribbly's* had hardware scrolling, sprite-to-sprite collisions, sprite-to-background collisions, character animation aplenty, in-sprite animation and two clocks. Oddly, those features got cut back as time progressed!

**How did you feel about leaving the C64 behind after *Intensity*?**

*Intensity* was my first game using the PDS development system, which made things a lot easier and allowed me to write my biggest and most complex program to date. But I had an Amiga at home and was experimenting with graphics, and I was therefore finding it quite difficult to think of new things to do with the C64. Then we got to do *Rainbow Islands*, and I did the 16-bit versions.

**How would you explain the C64's lengthy commercial lifespan?**

The C64 hardware was great, well ahead of the competition. There was excellent documentation, and you didn't need too many tools to get started. Later, different cross-assemblers were available so you could write on PCs, speeding up development more.

> "Paradroid hit the spot because it was a bit different, and… very well balanced"
>
> Andrew Braybrook

I would play games all evening. It was a free arcade, basically." As well as playing through *Zzap*'s library, of course, Jaz was reviewing a barrage of new releases, which, as he notes, had begun to diverge more and more from the coin-ops that had once massively influenced C64 gaming. "Certainly by the time we joined *Zzap*, there were a lot of really interesting new games coming out. People were beginning to riff on arcade games a little bit and produce arcade adventures like *Staff Of Karnath*. You began to get more original and interesting titles like *Spy Vs Spy*, and things like that."

**As 1985 progressed and turned into 1986, a string of superlative Commodore 64 games were released, and it became apparent that C64 gaming was experiencing a golden age.** Jaz's recollections of this time are of how exciting it was to go to work each day. "There was just a period of real innovation, and it was really exciting working on the magazine during that time. Every day you would come into work and rush to the mailbox to see what had been sent in for review that day. Every month there seemed to be some amazing new innovation – like *Wizball* or *The Last Ninja* – that pushed the design of games and the C64 at the same time." Andrew Braybrook was responsible for two of those amazing innovations, but the coder is characteristically modest about his achievements. "*Paradroid* hit the spot because it was a bit different, and turned out to be very well balanced. *Uridium* then hit another spot because it was obviously running at a higher, smoother frame-rate, and had speed and a stark graphical look." Head of System 3 Mark Cale puts his firm's exemplary C64 output during this period down to prioritising Commodore's system. "Some would argue that we were perhaps the best publisher on the C64. Our team was so specialised, so that's why we focused on it. Because we knew our skillsets in terms of what we could do in pushing the machine."

A contributing factor to the constant evolution of C64 gaming throughout the course of 1986 was a growing sense of camaraderie felt among the machine's UK developers, which programmer Andrew Braybrook attributes to *Zzap!64* magazine. "The programmer competitions that *Zzap* set up were key for me, where I got to talk to other programmers. Everyone seemed happy to talk about stuff. Tony Crowther had just implemented his sprite multiplexor in a game and told me what it was doing. Once you knew something could be done, you could usually figure out how to do it, but he told me anyway!" *Zzap*'s Jaz Rignall adds: "There was just a really strong community between the programmers who were constantly sharing demos and tricks, and pushing the machine forward. I just think that helped keep the system feeling really fresh and exciting."

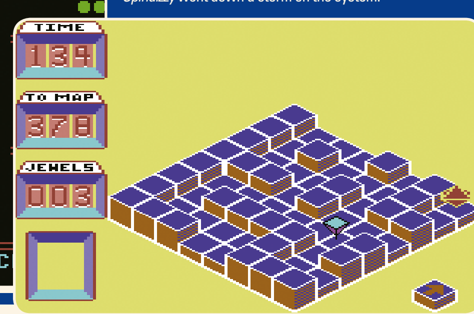
Equally responsible for making UK Commodore 64 gaming so exciting during this period was the wealth of top-flight US C64 games being imported into Britain. Graftgold's Steve Turner puts the radical differences between American and British C64 titles down to issues of scale. "The American market was a huge affair; it was just totally different to Britain. US firms could afford the development because they had this huge sales base, where we couldn't afford to spend so much money. But Americans would have never come up with things like *Wizball*, the quirky things that the Brits were really good at. We programmed in assembler down to the metal. They did things more on a professional basis, and used development machines." *Zzap*'s Jaz Rignall agrees, and highlights additional factors. "A lot of the British people were bedroom programmers. In the UK, there was a little more desire to really push the machine as far as you could go. And whereas early American software was quite advanced, British programmers caught up then overtook them. I think that had to do with Americans using disk drives; there wasn't that same mentality of trying to squeeze everything down on to a cassette."



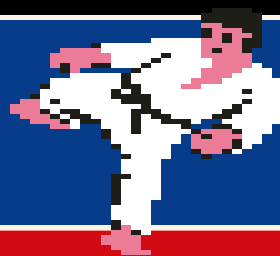
» [C64] The Commodore 64 was an absolute beast when it came to scrolling, so games like *Parallax* always managed to impress.




» [C64] The C64 received a cracking conversion of Taito's classic coin-op *Bubble Bobble*.




» [C64] Not a C64 original, but Paul Shirley's *Spindizzy* went down a storm on the system.





CLASSICS

# HEWSON CONSULTANTS

**The small UK publisher that punched above its weight**




## PARADROID

■ What strikes you when playing Andrew Braybrook's *Paradroid* is that it's the creation of a developer who really understands the C64. The game's iconic graphics and silky-smooth animation are indicators, but its gameplay provides irrefutable evidence. *Paradroid*'s gameplay is brilliant and brilliantly simple; it's a droid war where battles are fought with lasers or via a sub-game. The game's hero is comparatively feeble, but sub-games are won through skill with the winner taking control of his opponent.

## URIDIUM

■ How do you follow up an instant classic like *Paradroid*? Well, Andrew Braybrook opted to design a title with little in common with its predecessor. Visually, the games have similarities, with top-down bas-relief graphics, but otherwise they're worlds apart. Where *Paradroid* defies classification, *Uridium* is an unapologetic shoot-'em-up with an emphasis on high-speed, skilful piloting and marksmanship. Levelling-up requires the dispatch of a set number of foes followed by a tricky bonus stage.





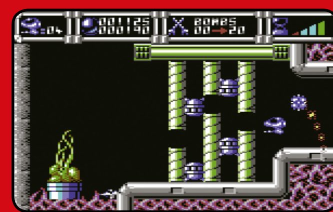


## NEBULUS

■ Although Nebulus wasn't John M Phillips's only C64 title, it's by far his most celebrated game on the system. At the time of its release, John's rotating tower-based platformer was nothing short of a revelation, which melted gamers minds by introducing them to three-dimensional cylinders. As playable as it is novel, *Nebulus* challenges players to ascend and destroy eight diabolically tricky towers replete with deadly abstract foes, disappearing platforms, time-saving elevators and ample back-tracking.

## CYBERNOID

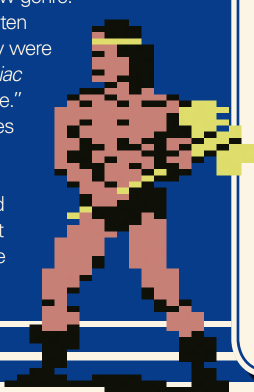
■ Commodore 64 conversions of Raffaele Cecco's Spectrum classics often weren't quite as well received as the originals. That is, except for Raff's *Cybernoid* titles, which went down a storm with Commodore 64 gamers and reviewers alike. Given hindsight, this probably makes a lot of sense, since the designer's Spectrum designs typically involved slow-burn platforming, whereas *Cybernoid* is a straightforward shoot-'em-up. The key to the game's appeal lies in its intimidating but always fair difficulty curve.



Celebrated American developer Ron Gilbert has his own unique take on the question of UK and US C64 games, and why Lucasfilm titles were so popular in Britain. "At the time, I don't think I differentiated between UK versus US titles. They were all just games lumped into one big bucket in my mind. But there were significant cultural differences that drove a lot of entertainment. I don't know that it's fair to say US games were financially driven back then; it was still a very developer-driven market. I think it gets down to aesthetics, but I'm not sure why Lucasfilm games had aesthetics that resonated in the UK. We designed what felt natural for us."

**Throughout 1987, the quantity of C64 games released dipped slightly from the fever-pitch rate of the previous two years, but the quality of 1987's best titles remained sky-high.** These were typified by Ron's genre-defining *Maniac Mansion*, of which the developer is humble. "We were just having fun making a game and trying not to get fired. Not once did it enter our heads we were doing something that would spawn a whole new genre. You can't plan innovation; it just happens and often comes from people who had no idea what they were doing. It's easy to look back and see what *Maniac Mansion* was, but at the time it was just a game."

Going into 1988, the flow of great C64 games slowed significantly, but the Commodore 64's closest rival received far fewer standout titles, as Jaz Rignall recollects. "The Spectrum tapped out fairly quickly. There had been plenty of great Spectrum games, but it wasn't like people were



# THE GRAPHICS ARTIST

**Paul 'Dokk' Docherty's memories of creating C64 game visuals**



**When did you first encounter the C64, and what were your impressions?**

I got one for Christmas 1983. The timing was good, because in 1984 this new wave of more polished games started to arrive. *Dropzone* blew my mind, Tony Crowther's *Wanted: Monty Mole* was another. The Taskset games had a nice balance of polish and playability too. And then Epyx and Lucasfilm got into making really special, high-end games, and it all took off.

**Why do you think that most C64 games artists tended to favour the system's lower-res mode?**

It wasn't about pixel count; it was about colour. The C64 had a unique colour palette at the time, which only made sense to exploit. In multi-colour mode you could have four colours to each 8×8 pixel cell, as opposed to just the foreground and background colour per 8×8 in hi-res mode. Plus most C64 owners didn't want to play games that looked like Spectrum games.

**How did you find designing graphics for C64 games compared to creating game visuals for other computers?**

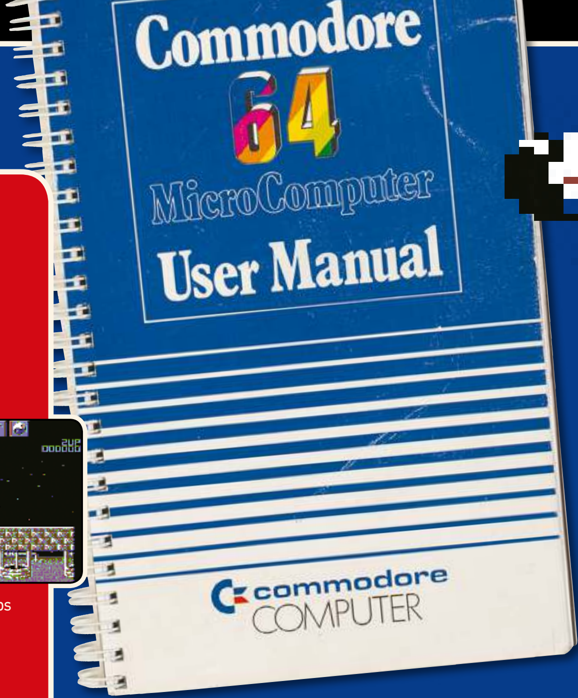
On the C64, I worked exclusively in Paint Magic using a joystick; the next-generation platforms came with a mouse. But the C64's limitations made working to deadlines a bit easier once I got to know what I could make work with its screen's colour limitations. Stepping up to the Amiga was a shock, because all those technical limitations were gone.

**How did you feel when you moved on from creating graphics for C64 games?**

I was already working on 16-bit platforms by the time I was asked to create the *Exile* loading screen for the C64, and I knew then that was the last chance I would get to make something in Paint Magic, so I tried to do something special.

**What are thoughts now when you look back at the C64 games you designed visuals for all those years ago?**

I don't think it's any exaggeration to say that the C64 changed my life. Discovering all of those games, joining Compunet, getting Paint Magic, getting work creating loading screens, going to Commodore trade shows, working for Firebird and then eventually moving to London to work as a C64 graphics artist. I was never the same person after I opened that Christmas present in 1983.






CLASSICS

# OCEAN SOFTWARE

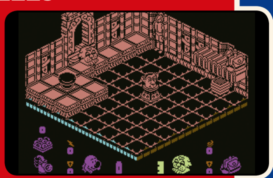
**The licensing expert with an eye for great original games**

## WIZBALL



■ For a licensing specialist, Ocean published some great C64 originals. Take *Wizball*, a novel game with a vertical learning curve. Sensible Software's masterpiece starts with a powerless wizard desperate for power-ups – he can't even control his movements or summon his cat. *Wizball*'s pet is essential, as only he can collect the colours required to decorate his master's colourless existence. Their world's other inhabitants prefer grey, however, and shooting them down takes *Wizball*'s gameplay from compelling to essential.

## HEAD OVER HEELS



■ Ultimate pioneered the isometric arcade adventure, but Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond took the concept to new heights. Assumptions had been that the Commodore 64 was too sluggish to manage a conversion of *Knight Lore*, but Jon and Bernie's *Head Over Heels* soundly dispelled that idea. By combining an ornate playfield and bizarre characters with inventive gameplay akin to a surreal treasure hunt, *Head Over Heels* more than justifies its reputation as the Commodore 64's greatest isometric adventure.

## BATMAN THE MOVIE




■ Ocean's third C64 *Batman* title, and likely also the firm's most lucrative, was based on director Tim Burton's popular late-Eighties big-screen interpretation of the Dark Knight. Following a template that was first used in *Platoon*, Ocean cherry-picked key scenes from Burton's movie and adapted them into distinct, sequential stages. A variety of genres are tapped to produce the game's five challenging levels, which involve puzzles, platforming and vehicle-based challenges featuring the Batmobile and Batwing.

## THE UNTOUCHABLES



■ While *The Untouchables* was certainly an action movie, its action scenes were hardly ideal for a C64 adaptation. Ocean overcame this slight problem, however, by reimagining the film's high-octane moments as game-friendly challenges. So there's a platforming warehouse bust, a *Gauntlet*-esque railway station encounter, and *Operation Wolf*-style border raid, alleyway shoot-out and Eliot Ness vs Al Capone stages. These distinct levels look good and play well, but they also form a cohesive and memorable game.

> **"Moving to the PC, I really missed some of the C64 hardware, like sprites and the SID chip"**
> Ron Gilbert

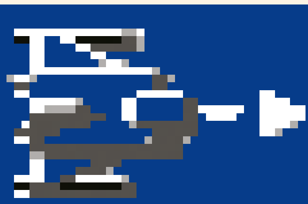
still finding new tricks to do with it all the time." Steve Turner of Graftgold concurs that the C64's custom hardware extended its gaming possibilities. "The C64 was ahead of its time compared to the Spectrum. The Spectrum really belonged to a different era, even though they were going head-to-head. The Spectrum had no sound support, no sprite chips – no graphic chip whatsoever." System 3's *Last Ninja 2* appeared on both machines in 1988, but boss Mark Cale concedes his firm's focus on the C64. "Perhaps the Spectrum didn't get the same love as we gave to the C64. Developers were reluctant to learn other systems because it took a long time. They preferred to stick to the system they knew, so making the C64 the focus was what we did."

**But while outstanding original C64 titles continued to appear throughout 1988, the Commodore 64 games market was changing dramatically.** Designer Ron Gilbert reflects on the situation stateside. "I loved the C64, but by the time *Maniac Mansion* and *Zak McKracken* came out, at least in the US, the C64 was falling fast and the IBM PC was gaining. So making the jump wasn't that hard, given that we wanted people to play our games. But moving to the PC, I really missed some of the C64 hardware, like sprites and the SID chip – it was so much better than crappy PC speaker music." Jaz Rignall, *C&VG* 's editor by late 1988, remembers big changes in UK C64 games at this time. "The market became devalued. I was really surprised at how many rereleases and compilations made the charts and how few original full-priced games [did]. But the C64 didn't exactly collapse; there was still quite a vibrant scene. Budget titles were being sold everywhere – newsagents and garages – so it was easy for a kid to pick up a game with his pocket money pretty much anywhere. They didn't have to go somewhere like WHSmith to get games anymore, and a lot of retailers wanted full-price games to justify the shelf-space. So C64 games become pretty much a disposable commodity."

The options open to developers of full-price C64 games in the face of this fierce budget opposition were stark, as Graftgold owner Steve Turner admits. "Budget games made it almost impossible to compete. Andrew Hewson wanted us just to make budget games. He said: 'I'll sell them at £1.99, and you'll get 10p a copy. I'll sell hundreds of thousands of them.' I was thinking: 'Even if you sell hundreds of thousands of them, I'm only getting £10,000. How long can I afford to spend working on a game for that?' So to me it was pulling the industry down in that there was so much cheap software that you had to distinguish yourself from. That meant that you had to spend more time on it, you had to have bigger budgets, and no one was going to give those budgets to C64 games."

By the tail-end of 1988, the number of developers producing full-price standout C64 titles had decreased dramatically. Steve Turner's Graftgold was still ably supporting the system, but only because the decision had been taken out of its hands. "We signed a deal with Telecomsoft where we got a down-payment providing we build a number of games on dual-format. They wanted at least Spectrum and C64, and that tied us into the machines for absolutely ages. *Soldier Of Fortune* hardly had any marketing. The C64 version was John Cumming's, and he had a job doing it just on his own. *Intensity* was Andrew [Braybrook]'s last game on the C64. Telecomsoft came to us with *Rainbow Islands*; Gary Foreman did the C64 version, and a pretty good job he made of that. *Bushido* was one of the last; that was trying to fulfil our contract. I thought it was going to make people sit up, but the publishing got delayed. By the time it got out, *Zzap!64* was reviewing Amiga games, and suddenly you couldn't impress anyone with C64 graphics. But Virgin saw *Rainbow Islands*, and that's what got us *Ivan Stewart's Super Off Road*." System 3 released a string of well-received C64 games between 1988 and 1991 without going the budget route; Mark Cale explains how. "We continued to exploit the C64 while it was still a strong machine. It wasn't just the C64;










you had the C64GS console and other iterations. The relationship we had with Commodore was exceptional; a lot of our products would get bundled with their hardware. So we didn't need to go into the budget world because we were selling based on quality."

**Few truly outstanding C64 games appeared during 1992 and 1993, but one was John and Steve Rowlands' heartfelt send-off, *Mayhem In Monsterland*.** "We loved the C64," John explains, "and being able to push it in unique and innovative ways was great, but only really possible towards the end of its life cycle. You simply didn't get the opportunity to do so with budget titles or games based on external IP – or the scope for doing so was relatively limited. Although conversions were the safe bet in a dwindling market, they just didn't appeal to us. We never answered to marketing departments; our games were 100% ours, and that was important. We were in it because we were creatives, not to make fat stacks."

Commodore subsequently filed for bankruptcy in April 1994, effectively ending the C64's commercial lifespan. Mainstream C64 game developers followed suit, including John Rowlands and his brother Steve. "We started developing straight out of school, but as we matured we realised that businesses had to grow and make money. We did seriously consider developing a sequel to *Mayhem In Monsterland*, but we reluctantly accepted that the day to move on had come."

Given hindsight, editor Jaz Rignall offers a glowing assessment of the C64's past and present. "Well, I think it was just a brilliant machine – it still stands up today." Artist Paul Docherty is in full agreement. "I still break out the C64 emulator to play Jeff Minter's games – *Iridis Alpha* is nuts, and *Hunter's Moon* by Martin Walker is incredibly relaxing." But the last word on Commodore's much-loved 8-bit on its 35th Anniversary goes to acclaimed C64 coder Andrew Braybrook. "There's an indie development community still creating games for the C64 even now, in 2017. The C64 was a fine machine, for sure." *

**With thanks to Steve Turner, Mark Cale, Andrew Braybrook, Paul Docherty, Jaz Rignall, Ron Gilbert and John Rowlands.**

## THE MAGAZINE EDITOR

### Former Zzap!64 editor Jaz Rignall on the rise and fall of the C64



**Would you say that the launch of *Zzap!64* motivated complacent C64 developers?**
Obviously there weren't many C64 magazines around, so we were quite well read. I would like to think we helped inspire programmers to use their imaginations and produce interesting games. *Zzap*'s timing was very fortunate in that we hit just at the right point. Christmas 1984 was when the C64 began to take off. Through 1985, people were really beginning to produce interesting software.

**Were there many C64 titles that came out before *Zzap* launched or after you left that you rated really highly?**
There were plenty of games that I really liked before I arrived at *Zzap*. *Boulder Dash* always sticks out; it's still one of my all-time favourites. *Ancipital*, *Spy Vs Spy*, there's a lot of really, really good games that were released around Christmas 1984 that I have a lot of love for. After I'd left, I was really more focused on console and Amiga games.

**Was your decision to leave *Zzap* related to the C64's declining popularity?**
Leaving the magazine was because I'd sort of grown out of Newsfield. There was a lot of drama and politics, and I was a little sick of it. It was that and wanting to expand *Zzap* to cover Amiga games – and obviously consoles were beginning to become very interesting. I wasn't exactly bored of the C64, but I wanted to write about stuff that really excited me. *C&VG* gave me that opportunity.

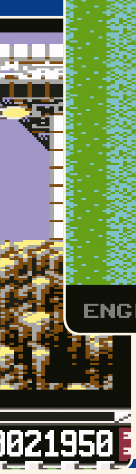
**How would you explain the subsequent C64 budget scene?**
Magazines were giving away full-price games on the front of them, and so consumers became very budget-conscious. There were still some decent full-price games, but the market seemed to be dominated by rereleases and compilations. It became very difficult to sell a full-price game when you could spend £2 on a really good rerelease.

**What theories would you offer for the C64's long life?**
It was very robust, it was graphically very good and the sound chip was amazing. It took a long time for people to squeeze every last drop of performance out of; the C64 had a lot of secrets to unlock. It was a technically amazing machine that was pushed to its limits by very enterprising programmers to produce some absolutely amazing games.



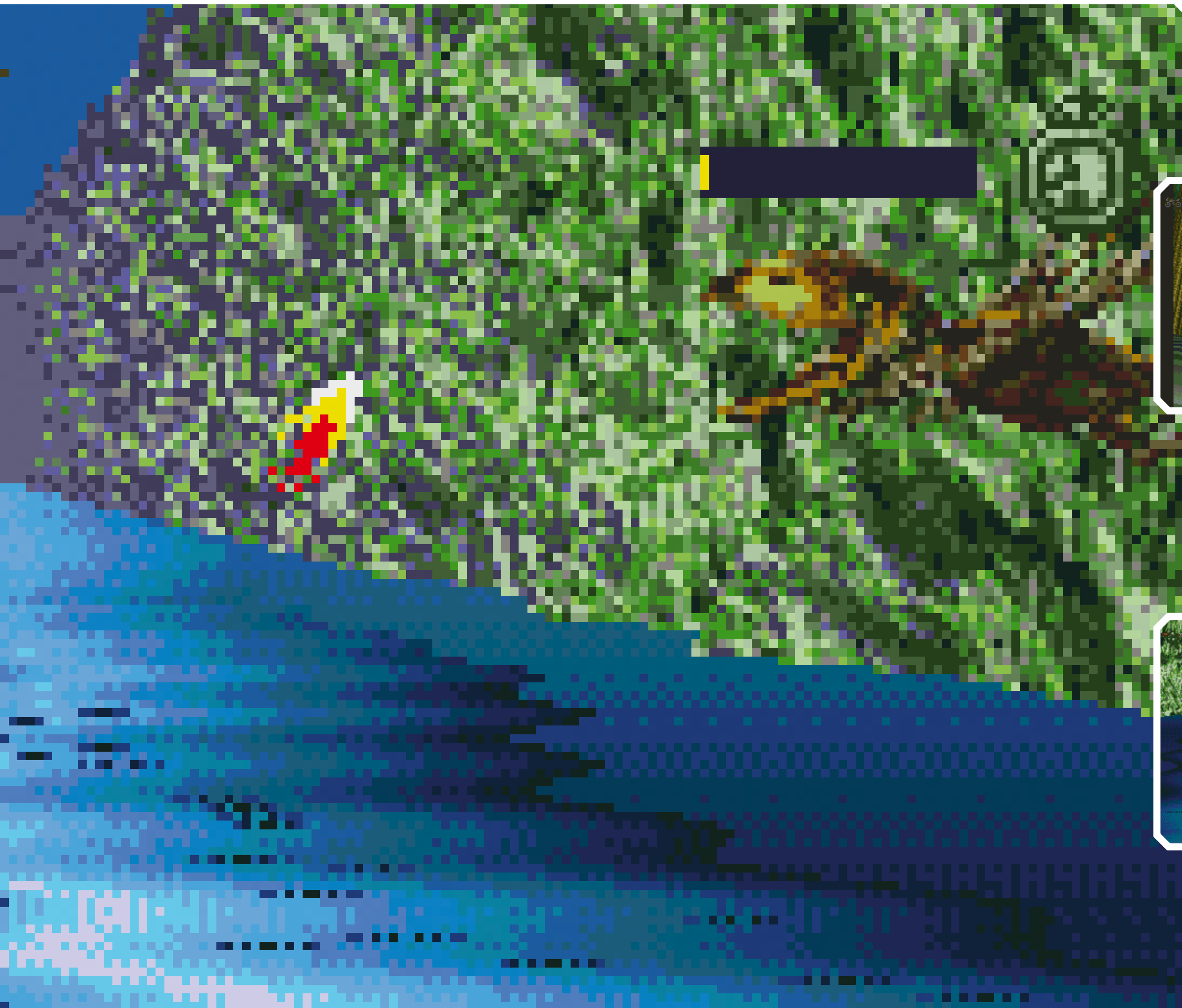



» [C64] *Microprose Soccer* used a cool top-down view that hadn't been seen in home computer football games before.




» [C64] A seminal C64 run-and-gun title, Manfred Trenz's *Turrican* is simply brilliant.





» PUSHING THE LIMITS

# The Lost World: Jurassic Park

The film licence that let the Ecco The Dolphin studio give the Mega Drive a spectacular send-off

» **DEVELOPER:** APPALOOSA INTERACTIVE
» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE » **RELEASED:** 1997

**It's easy to point to the peak of Appaloosa's 24 years in videogame development – the glory days of *Ecco The Dolphin* on the Mega Drive.** The Hungarian developer, known as Novotrade prior to 1996, had hit it big with the aquatic adventure and ended up in demand. Konami wanted the studio for its 32-bit *Contra* adventures, and licensed projects were coming in thick and fast. However, it was one special licensed project that gave the studio a chance to repay the Mega Drive for its role in the company's success.

*The Lost World: Jurassic Park* was an inescapably big deal in 1997. Its predecessor had been a box office smash and as a result, videogame versions were being considered for every platform – even those which were somewhat past their prime, such as the Game Boy and Mega Drive. Sega chose Appaloosa to convert Electronic Arts' PlayStation game to the Saturn, and also to create an entirely original version for its ageing 16-bit console.

The result was a top-down shoot-'em-up, not dissimilar to the SNES version of the original *Jurassic Park*, but without the cartoonish style. However, while the meat of the gameplay looked lovely and played well enough, Appaloosa decided to show off years of Mega Drive coding skill by putting together some of the most spectacular 3D bonus games ever seen on the console.

Escaping during the flight of the pteranodons is an awesome sight to behold, with super-smooth animations of hundreds of the creatures, and the river chase is spectacular too, with your raft bobbing over and under the surface of the water. And the motorbike chase proved to be an equally spectacular scene – the *Deathchase*-style pursuit of a rampaging dinosaur featured not only scaling trees, fellow bikers and the deadly lizard, but a rotation effect that convinced you that your bike was actually leaning into turns.

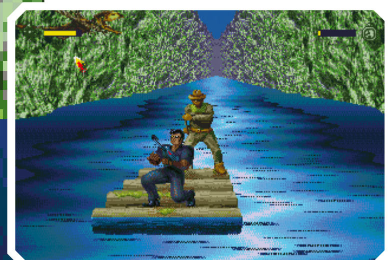
As the final Mega Drive game published by Sega, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* came out to little fanfare. Most magazines ignored it and much of the Mega Drive's audience had already moved on, meaning that it tends to get unfairly overlooked when the Mega Drive's most incredible technical feats are discussed. There's no excuse now, though – give it a look! *

## HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...



### Rotation

Your motorbike pursuit of a fleeing dino is spectacular for many reasons, including the enormous enemy and smart dithering to avoid trees popping out of nowhere. But when you lean the bike to steer, the trees rotate! Superb.



### Pseudo-3D

We can't quite work out the technique that Appaloosa used to create the rocky walls that line this river – it's a seriously impressive effect that almost manages to give the early 3D consoles a run for their money.



### Animated backdrops

The Mega Drive was always capable of some background animation. However, the sight of hundreds of pteranodons in flight, both in the sky and reflected in the water below, is one of the most stunning on the console.



### Expert sprite work

Thanks to years of experience on the Mega Drive hardware, Appaloosa had an excellent grasp of how to drag the most value from its near-decade-old graphics chip, and particularly its notoriously limited colour palette.

# LICENCE TO THRILL

## NOW SHOWING: PLATOON






**Oliver Stone's first Vietnam film provided the material for a landmark Ocean Software release. Andrew Fisher looks back at how the multi-part adaptation happened**

### FILM

- » **YEAR:** 1986
- » **DIRECTOR:** Oliver Stone
- » **STARRING:** Tom Berenger, William Defoe, Charlie Sheen
- » **BUDGET:** $6.5 Million
- » **BOX OFFICE:** $138.5 Million (US Box Office), $69 Million (US Rentals)

### GAME

- » **YEAR:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHER:** Ocean / Sunsoft (NES)
- » **DEVELOPER:** Ocean

Director Oliver Stone had served during the Vietnam War and wrote the *Platoon* script based on his own experiences. The cast underwent a gruelling training camp on location in The Philippines before filming, including digging foxholes, jungle patrols and simulated attacks. The plot followed volunteer Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) as he arrived in the war zone, watching body bags leave. A power struggle between Sgt Elias and Sgt Barnes played out as Taylor started to question the morality of those around him. Moviegoers and critics applauded the film's anti-war tone, with *Platoon* going on to win four Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director.




» [C64] A blocked exit in the tunnels means you have to find another way out.

Ocean's Gary Bracey explains the reasoning behind contacting Orion Pictures. "Oliver Stone was a hot director at the time and the word from the US was that this was going to be a 'biggie'. The film was pretty much complete when we licensed and the buzz was pretty good so we knew it would be high-profile." Orion provided some help to Ocean. "We got to attend a couple of screenings pre-release and we were provided with the usual sets of official stills and the script."

Simon Butler was in charge of the forces Ocean deployed. "I designed the game, I storyboarded it and then I oversaw each version as it was being developed, so I suppose I was working in a semi-producer type role." That process started with seeing the film. "I was told I would be going down to London for a private movie viewing for the next game Ocean wanted me to design. I felt quite flattered being the only person from Ocean to see the film and even though there were two or three more people in the screening room, it still felt very exclusive." Simon did have some reservations as he left the screening. "How the hell was I going to translate the level of gore and dismemberment to a youthful audience on an 8-bit machine?"

Mark R Jones was living in the same house as Simon at the time and

> **" I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy; we fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us "**
> Chris Taylor







» (Top) An early glimpse at the design process for Platoon, drawn by Simon Butler.

» (Above) [C64] Blowing up the bridge in level 1.

contributed an important design idea. "The one bit I remember definitely coming up with was the tunnel section and recall suggesting that, to give the player a heart attack, at some point an enemy soldier who'd been hiding in the water would come up out of it wielding a huge knife and attack you. I gained inspiration from the ZX-81 game *3D Monster Maze* by New Generation Software – a game I remember enjoying playing when I was younger."

Simon continues. "I just started breaking the movie down into its various elements, trying to keep as much of the flavour as possible. I discussed each section as I worked on various ideas with Gary and he threw in suggestions, so it was a very collaborative process and this helped speed matters through to a complete design." Gary notes, "This was the first movie licence to get the 'multi-part' design – different gameplay styles for different sections of the film. It worked really well and we adopted a similar model for the likes of *RoboCop*, *Batman*, *The Untouchables* and so on."

The storyboards show some impressive ideas, so did they have to scale it down? Simon replies, "There were elements from the film we would have liked to attempt but we knew that the 8-bit machines were not capable of such things, so we worked within the parameters of what was possible. We would obviously have liked to have the tunnel sections in smooth 3D, but this is only with hindsight. No one did tunnels smoothly; you always jumped forward one step at a time. The design ticked all the boxes and we believed it would give a good representation of the movie."

As Mark explains, only one version was actually developed at Ocean. "It's odd how only the C64 version was worked on in-house. It was a tremendously important licence for Ocean. Maybe nobody was free to start on it at the time." Zach Townsend programmed the C64 version, with detailed graphics by Andrew Sleigh and Martin McDonald. In-house musician Jonathan Dunn created an amazing series of tunes, which ▶

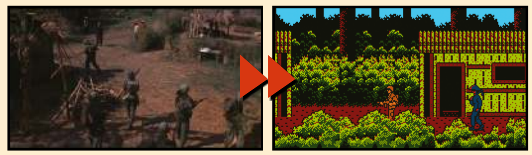
## MOVIE TO GAME COMPARISON

How Stone's film transitioned from the silver screen to the home systems of the time



### TRIP YOU UP

Both sides in the Vietnam War used tripwires. The film still shows a wire designed to catch a soldier's leg. The game's first level features hard-to-spot tripwires that kill a platoon member instantly, but can be blown up with a well-placed grenade.



### THE VILLAGE

The platoon searches a village suspected of helping the Viet Cong, leading to brutal tactics from Sgt Barnes. Searching the game's village, players must not shoot the villagers and must avoid vicious booby traps in the huts. The trapdoor leading to the tunnels is found here.



### NIGHT ATTACK

With the platoons dug in, the North Vietnamese Army launches a deadly night attack. In the game, the player uses flares found in the tunnels to light up the attackers. But they quickly fade, leaving just the outlines of the enemies and their muzzle flash to see by.



### NAPALM

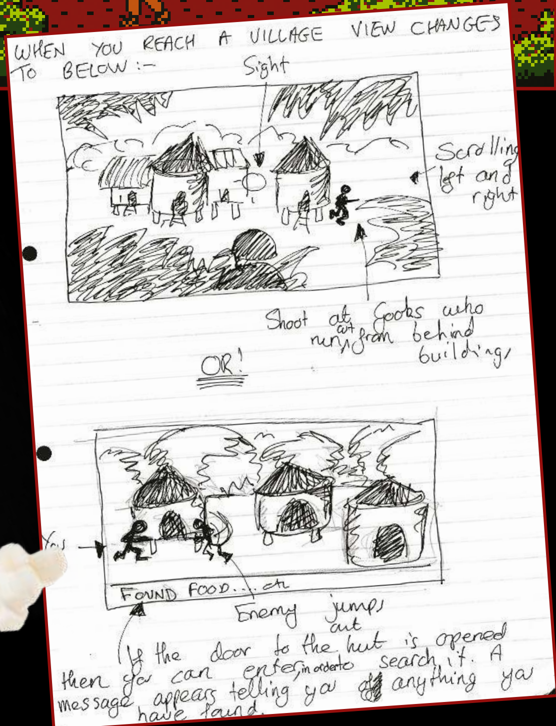
A napalm strike is called in to stop the night attack, and it saves Taylor from death at the hands of Sgt Barnes. The impending napalm drop gives the two-minute time limit for the game's final level. The player races through mines, barbed wire and enemy fire to reach the bunker.



### WOUNDS

The film and the game end with Taylor (Charlie Sheen) being evacuated by helicopter, as he has suffered two wounds in the course of duty – earning him the trip home. The NES version excels in its ending, with animated sequences of Taylor and the chopper flying away over the credits.






» [NES] Patrolling the jungle, you need to watch out for enemy soldiers and traps.

» The storyboard for the village section had the player's view scrolling left and right.

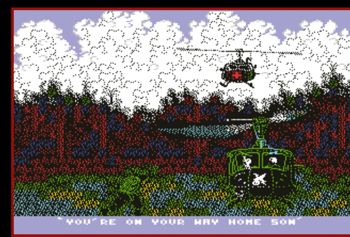
> **"We've been kicking other people's asses for so long, I figured it's time we got ours kicked"**
> Sgt Elias

were used as the basis for the music on all other formats. Simon remembers, "[The] coders and artists did a sterling job and there were no crossed words or raised voices, which would probably have been a first where I was concerned at that time in my career."

Amstrad and Spectrum versions would be the work of Choice Software in Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland, along with the later 16-bit games. Sean Pearce was the main programmer involved. "Choice had a close working relationship with Ocean Software, as we performed many conversions for them. We developed a very good working platform and set of standardised libraries, such that we could share the bulk of the code between Amstrad and Spectrum –




» [ZX Spectrum] Navigating the tunnels without the map is very tricky.



» [C64] The C64's static bitmap picture marked the game's end.

really, the main differences being the graphics themselves, and probably the specialised scrolling. I'm sure we mostly completed the 8-bit versions before continuing work on 16-bit – but I recall that the graphics etc were already worked on in parallel by the Ocean artists, in preparation."

Sean remembers the end of the project. "There were some very late nights and an epic 72-hour marathon the weekend before launch to get the final bits of the game completed. I recall going into work on a Friday. Gary came over [from England] and literally stood over our shoulders to ensure that we delivered the master tapes on Monday! It was slightly unfair that we ferried him to his hotel and back again in the morning, whilst we pulled all-nighters to get everything completed. Glad to say it all worked out. Then I was flown over

# NOTABLE VERSIONS




## COMMODORE 64

■ This deserved its 94% *ZZAP!* Sizzler, making use of sprite overlays to give extra definition and detail. The Jonathan Dunn soundtrack is superb throughout, adding to the atmosphere. The tunnels section stands out with its big enemies and large map to explore. Sadly, a static bitmap is the only reward for completion.




## AMSTRAD CPC

■ Sadly, the bright colour palette of the Amstrad does little justice to the graphics. It is a workmanlike conversion that features all the gameplay, made more palatable by the excellent David Whittaker versions of Jonathan Dunn's tunes. Like the Spectrum version, it lacks a proper ending sequence.




## ZX SPECTRUM

■ Sean Pearce did a decent job with the Spectrum version, fitting in all the gameplay. The 3D of the tunnels works surprisingly well, with large detailed enemies and smooth movement. The night attack looks the part, too. David Whittaker got good music and sound out of the AY chip on the 128K Spectrum.




## ATARI ST

■ Choice Software's Sean Pearce was also coder for both 16-bit games, and they follow the design well – although the ST and Amiga generally scored less in reviews than the C64 version. Only the bigger colour palette and beefier sound distinguish it from the 8-bit originals.



» The scary ambush, as depicted in the storyboard.




» [C64] The loading screen was an adaptiation of the famous movie poster, depicting the death of Sgt Elias.

to England. Firstly to Telford – to work on squeezing the tape protection into the loading code in the Ablex factory (another all-nighter); then down to London for the launch. I don't recall much from the launch party – because I was exhausted! Oh, and I missed my then girlfriend's 21st birthday party because of the trip; well at least she forgave me as we've been happily married since 1995."

Gary secured some clever cross-promotion. The loading screens for the 8-bit versions promoted the VHS release, and the VHS of the film promoted the game. Mark recalls, "The box looked great on the shelf in the shops; you got a poster and a photo of the cast. There was also a second audio tape containing 'Tracks Of My Tears' by Smokey Robinson, a song featured in the film. It formed a nice package and, with all the different sections, provided good value for money." The reviewers agreed, giving the 8-bit games high marks, as Simon recalls, "I was exceptionally happy with the reviews. I wasn't particularly happy with the fact that I was never mentioned as having designed the title or given any credit. Story, narrative and morals were virtually impossible on the machines of the day. Reviews stated it was one of the best movie tie-in titles, so perhaps we did succeed."

The success of *Platoon* helped Ocean secure another licence. Gary says, "Rather than just pocketing the advance licence fee, Orion made pretty good royalty revenues from sales of the game and they were probably the first studio to take games licensing seriously. We developed a great working relationship with them and we became their 'go to' games publisher for all their big films. *RoboCop* was a result of that." Ocean would return to Vietnam with *The Lost Patrol*, a more mature 16-bit game that featured ideas from the original *Platoon* designs. (A 2002 PC strategy game also licensed *Platoon*.) Looking back, Simon says: "I enjoyed the process, I was happy with the end result and it's one title where I'm more than proud to say 'I worked on that.'" War was certainly good for Ocean. *

**With thanks to Mark R Jones for the artwork, and all the interviewees for taking part.**

## ARTISTIC LICENCE

**Did that really happen...**

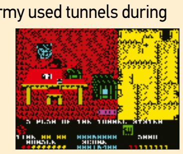
### FLARES

■ The film shows a single flare lighting up the jungle during the climactic night attack. In the game, the player must collect flares from the tunnels to illuminate the attackers – but they are limited in number and soon burn out.



### THE TUNNELS

■ The tunnel sequence in the film is relatively short, with Sgt Elias exploring at a crouch. The longer tunnels level in the game reflects the way the North Vietnamese Army used tunnels during the war, as storage and a way to move troops around.



### KILLING BARNES

■ In the film, Barnes is killed by Taylor in revenge for the death of Elias. In the game, the player races through the jungle to the bunker where Barnes is hiding – and blows him up with grenades.












### AMIGA

■ There was sadly little effort to take advantage of the Amiga's hardware. Graphics are almost identical to the ST, including Steve Wahid's loading screen. Sampled sound and enhanced music round out the package, but there is no game-complete sequence. Stuart Campbell awarded the Hit Squad re-release 73%.

### APPLE II

■ This disappointing conversion was handled by Quicksilver Software and published by Data East. An average loading screen is followed by some poor in-game sprites and backgrounds. The tapping footsteps soon get on the nerves, and the impulse to see further is soon dampened by the aggressive enemies you encounter.

### DOS

■ Providing both EGA and CGA graphics options, the DOS version tried its best to recreate the gameplay. It never hit the heights of the original C64 game and feels cumbersome to control. Unusually for Data East's PC games at the time, this was a DOS executable and had options for hard disk installation.

### NES

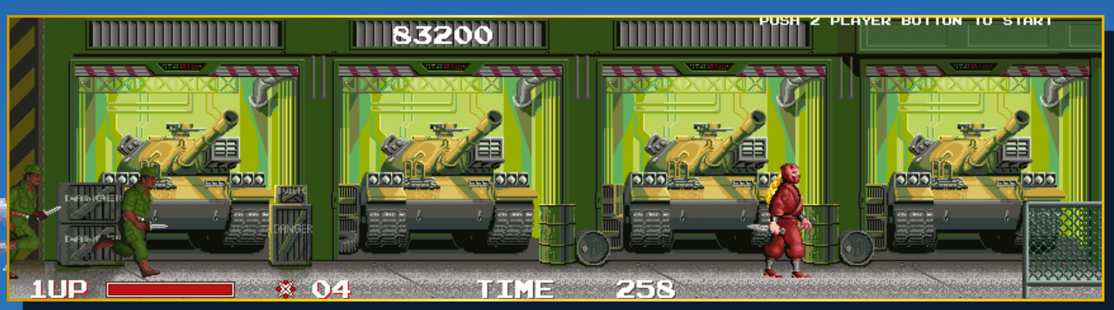
■ Sunsoft produced the NES version to Ocean's design. Bright colours and a lack of the selection option mar the jungle level, but the 3D tunnels impress. The game-complete sequence deserves extra applause. Music and sound try their best to interpret Jonathan Dunn's work. A VS version appeared in the arcades.

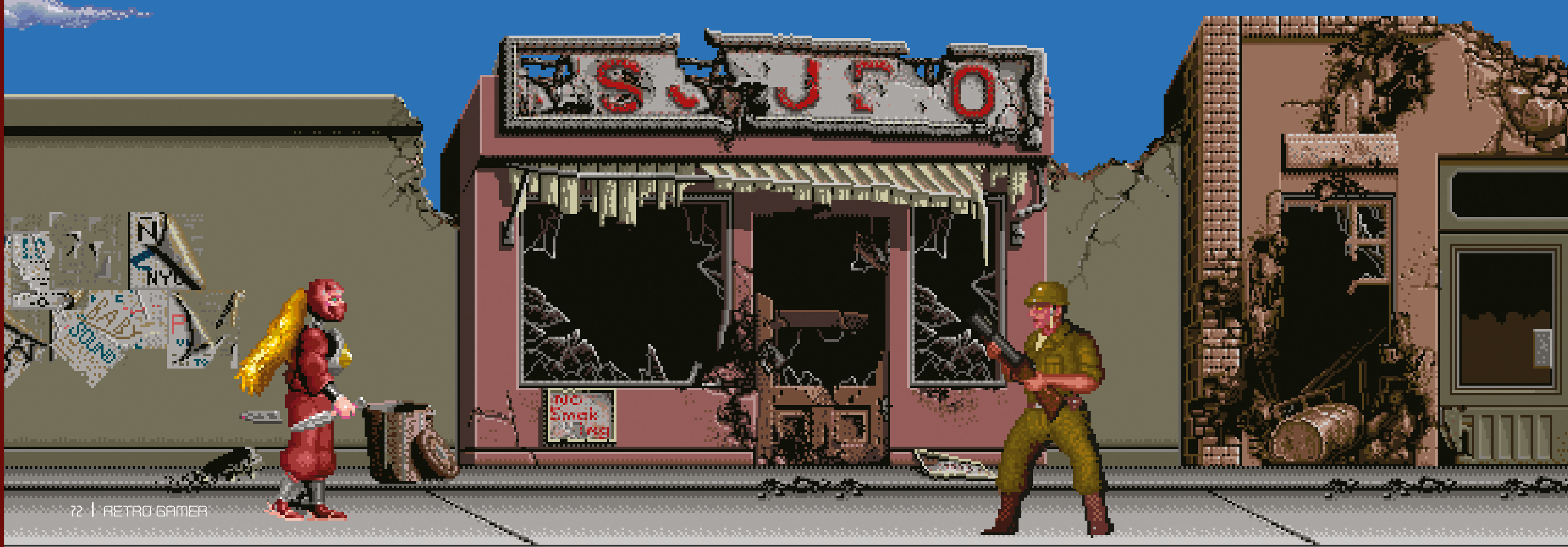
# THE NINJA W

## The Ninja Warriors: two valiant heroes who must battle against the forces of evil president Banglar, a militaristic leader with no qualms over crushing all opposition and resistance. Grab those shurikens and prepare to battle!

**Arcade history is littered with examples of how the industry used imaginative technology to enhance the gaming experience.** Think *Battlezone*'s submarine-style viewer, *Out Run*'s iconic car setup, *Operation Wolf*'s compact machine gun, and, of course, *Space Harrier*'s arcade game-cum-fairground-ride pneumatic seat. *The Ninja Warriors*, Taito Corporation's 1987 arcade game, took the triple-screen setup popularised by the shoot-'em-up *Darius* and blended it into a scrolling martial arts extravaganza, backed by a bizarre plot and novel central character concept.

Set in a grim 'near future' of 1993, *The Ninja Warriors* is, in fact, a tale of anarchy (or terrorism, depending on your point of view) against an oppressive state under martial law. The president, known simply as Banglar, has handed the military complete autonomous control of the United States; its population subdued, it's left to



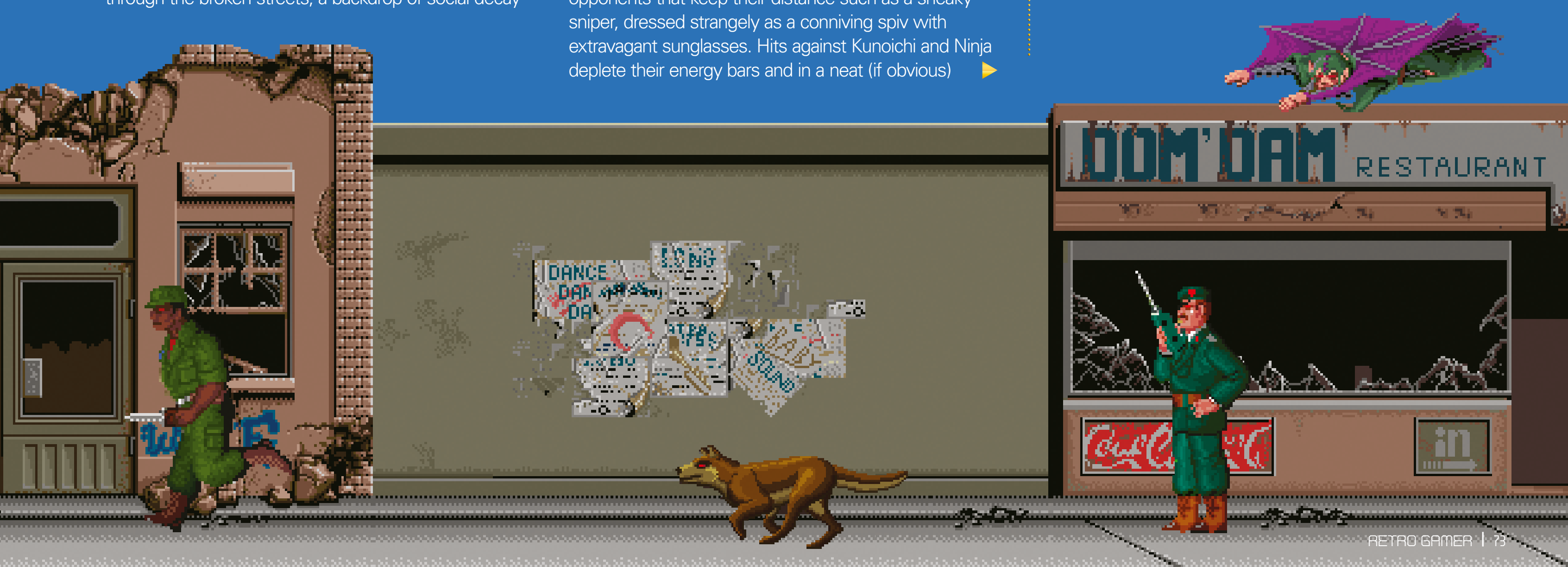





» [Arcade] Some of the background graphics in *The Ninja Warriors* are undeniably impressive.

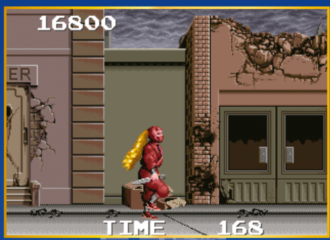
a bunch of rebel scientists, led by another oddly-named character, to rise up and do something about this unpleasant situation. Mulk and his fellow eggheads decide their best option is to create two highly-advanced androids to wage battle against the devilish army forces and destroy the evil president. Codenamed Kunoichi (a blond red-suited woman) and Ninja (blue-clad male), the scientists let the pair loose and sit back, no doubt smug that their robotic offspring is taking care of business, and their own considerably less robust skins are perfectly safe in some underground bunker.

Kunoichi and Ninja commence their mission strolling through the broken streets, a backdrop of social decay and unrest. The Dom Dam restaurant has had its front window smashed in, other buildings are vandalised or even half-demolished and the ninjas are soon assaulted from both sides by the red-eyed and demonic military forces of America. Armed with knives, rifles and grenade launchers, what seems like several platoons of soldiers attack our valiant robots, with an occasional special character entering the fray for that extra challenge. To defend themselves, the Ninjas have a pair of kunai daggers: short knives that are swift, if a little limited in terms of range. They also have a restricted supply of shurikens that come in handy against those opponents that keep their distance such as a sneaky sniper, dressed strangely as a conniving spiv with extravagant sunglasses. Hits against Kunoichi and Ninja deplete their energy bars and in a neat (if obvious)



# PLAYING TIPS

Be the best ninja with our handy hints




## Conserve the shurikens

■ Kunoichi and/or Ninja start the game with just 30 shurikens and they are always in short supply, with no small boxes of them scattered around, just a handful granted upon despatching certain enemies. As such, save them as much as possible for the end-of-level bosses.

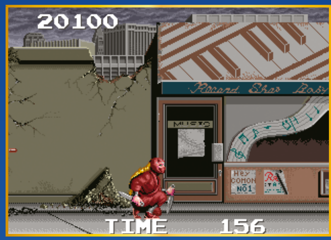



## Know your enemy

■ This runs true for many arcade games, of course, but it is mightily beneficial to watch out for the different type of enemies and learn the best tactics for each one of them. For instance, some dogs require a crouched stab, while blue-suited soldiers take two hits rather than one.

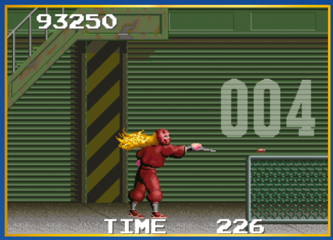
## Eliminate the armed enemies

■ While the knife-wielding bad guys obviously require attention, the ranged enemies, such as riflemen, snipers and grenadiers, can be a real pain if not taken out pronto. Destroy the ones in front of you with your daggers, and fling a few of your shurikens behind you if required.




## Blocking bullets

■ Okay, this certainly looks cooler than it is actually useful, but the ninjas can actually knock incoming bullets out of the air using their kunai. In practice, it's better to just duck and avoid the enemies' projectiles, but it's an undeniably satisfying feeling flicking a random hazard away like it's an annoying fly.







## Don't forget the somersault

■ The one special move in the robot ninja's armoury is a nifty somersault jump, activated by pressing fire and jump while walking. Its use is neutered in many battles as you'll often find yourself hitting another enemy, but it's vital for taking on the many superior baddies.




## Duck… and duck

■ *The Ninja Warriors* is one of those games where you spend a lot of time on your knees if you want to survive for long. Flying soldiers, head-high bullets and bat-men all threaten a standing ninja, while the crouch offers relative safety, and you can still stab. The ninja inches along at an even slower pace, however.

# BOSS RUSH

These are no match for our Ninja Warriors




## Tank

■ The gargantuan tank appears several times, announcing itself with some distant pot shots before lurching into view. The tank commander then pops up and fires his machine gun at our heroes.

**HOW TO BEAT:** Jump over the machine gun fire and onto the tank, stabbing the commander before he ducks down. Or, use shurikens if you have some left, although he ducks down quickly.




## Ninjas

■ Wielding the same classical daggers as Ninja and Kunoichi, this pair of enemies is also dressed similarly and represent a significant challenge. The duo also sports freaky masks.

**HOW TO BEAT:** Utilise a common tactic and somersault over them and stab them from behind, trying to avoid getting caught in the middle. Due to their ability to block, shurikens are not much use.




## Hunchback Ground Spider

■ This strange creature, like our ninja heroes, looks robotic and scurries along the ground before leaping into the air. It blocks all attacks with a pair of robust metallic arms.

**HOW TO BEAT:** Wait until it leaps over you and then strike as it slowly turns, either with daggers if close enough, or shurikens at range. Front on attacks are useless, thanks to its block.




## Firebreather

■ Complete with flowing crimson locks and beard, this powerful boss spews deadly fire breath that can soon turn the player to a crisp. He first appears in level two.

**HOW TO BEAT:** Similar to the ninjas, wait until he approaches and attacks, then somersault over him and jam your knife in between his shoulder blades. Repeat until he falls over, then stoke up the barbecue.



twist, their metallic origins can be exposed should they take enough strikes to the head or chest; take too much serious damage and they explode in a shower of gears and chrome, and it's time to hit the continue button. The pair must fight through a small selection of areas such as a military base and – yes! – sewers before reaching a White House-esque building that houses more soldiers, boss enemies and the reprehensible leader himself. Accomplish your mission, however, and there's a rather nasty surprise waiting – clearly Mulk's overall plan to liberate the United States doesn't involve our heroic pair of mechanoids.




» [Arcade] Rule 122 of arcade gaming: every scrolling brawler must contain a level set in sewers.

**As mentioned, *The Ninja Warriors'* arcade machine generously gave customers an extra two screens to play with, giving the impression of a widescreen display.** In fact the effect is slightly deceptive – the middle screen is a normal monitor, while the displays either side are actually mirrors, reflecting the screens housed in the cabinet below. The extra screens obviously means there is plenty more horizontal room, helping the game's simultaneous two-player mode to work very satisfactorily. The ninjas are attacked by soldiers from both sides, and it would seem money is short in this new American army as the majority of the enemies are armed with a mere knife. These can be despatched with one swipe of your own dagger, or two shurikens, of which there is a finite supply – extras can be accrued by eliminating certain opponents. Other enemies include soldiers armed with rifles (the cads!), jumping soldiers, blue-suited grunts that take double the amount of hits, and attack dogs. Yes, as in *Sly Spy* (**Retro Gamer** issue 168), *The Ninja Warriors* does its bit for the animal kingdom, allowing you to maim dozens of pooches, once more with a worryingly accurate yelp as accompaniment.

If this all sounds a bit run of the mill, well, that's because it kind of is. *The Ninja Warriors* may have an interesting quirk in its trio of screens, but that's where the innovation sadly ends, as if the game's designers didn't consider they had to actually build much else into the experience. The variety of opposition is credible, but oft-repeated and hugely capricious in difficulty. The metal-armed hunchbacks that pepper the game are easy to take down, while the gargantuan tank – an admittedly impressive technical feat – can be a frustrating experience, and one that occurs several times. More significantly, by the late Eighties brawlers, such as *Double Dragon* and *Renegade*, had already pioneered the use of multiple planes, with players





## Iron Arm

■ This huge boss is not only heavily armoured, but also wields a bone-crunching wrecking ball that he swings around his head and uses to knock out the ninja at distance.

**HOW TO BEAT:** With great difficulty! Probably the hardest of the bosses, speed and deftness is the key. Either duck under his attack and ping a shuriken at his legs or jump toe-to-toe and slash quickly before somersaulting away. Repeat. A lot.




## Ninja Swordlady

■ At the end of level one awaits this blue-clad swordswoman with a rather ominous-looking sword. Her hair is identical to Kunoichi's apart from its colour.

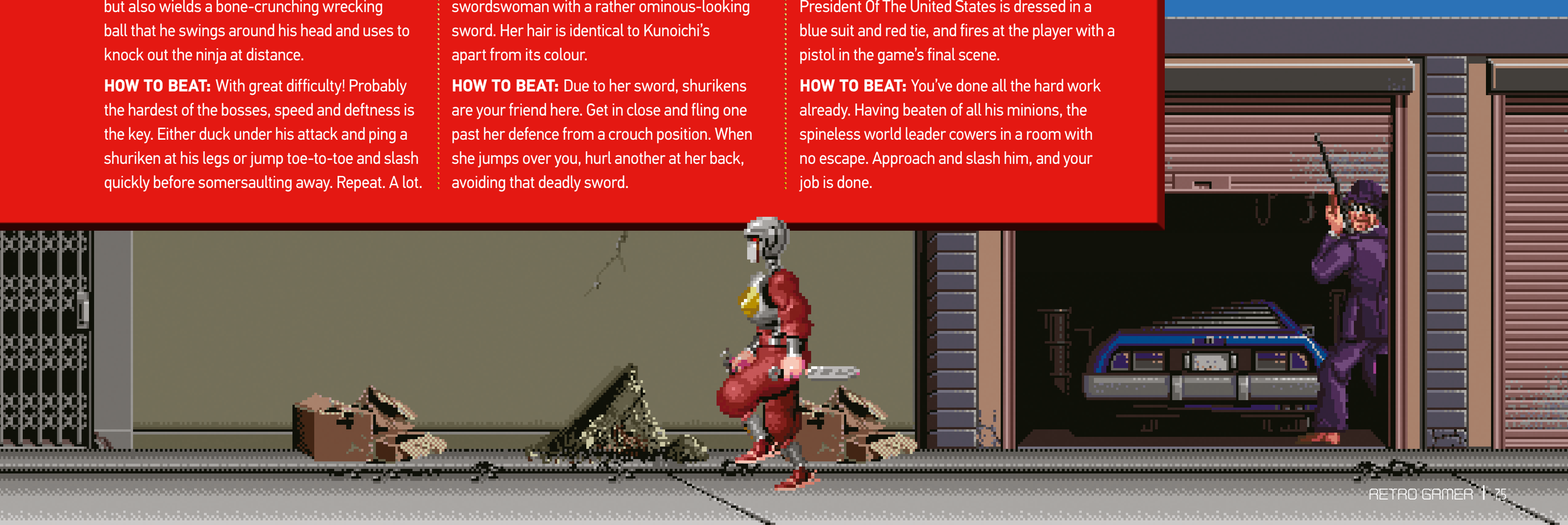
**HOW TO BEAT:** Due to her sword, shurikens are your friend here. Get in close and fling one past her defence from a crouch position. When she jumps over you, hurl another at her back, avoiding that deadly sword.




## President

■ The grey-skinned and bulbous so-called President Of The United States is dressed in a blue suit and red tie, and fires at the player with a pistol in the game's final scene.

**HOW TO BEAT:** You've done all the hard work already. Having beaten of all his minions, the spineless world leader cowers in a room with no escape. Approach and slash him, and your job is done.



# CONVERSION CAPERS

Which version of Ninja Warriors comes out on top?




## Amstrad CPC

■ First impressions are quite encouraging, due to its impressive rendition of the first level's music on its title screen. Things go downhill from there, though, with slow gameplay that manages to make the laborious original look expeditious. Couple this with dodgy hit detection and it's a duff port, which is a shame because two-player action is supported and the graphics are decent enough, especially the Ninjas' somersault jump.

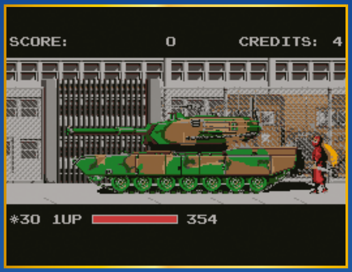



## Amiga

■ The 16-bit computer ports were coded by John Croudy and Ron Pieket with graphics by Ned Langman. This Amiga version pips the Atari ST as a few tweaks have been employed in order to avoid it being just another port of its fellow computer. The biggest of these improvements is some smooth scrolling and vibrant colours and the pared down, more electronic, soundtrack also perfectly suits the game.

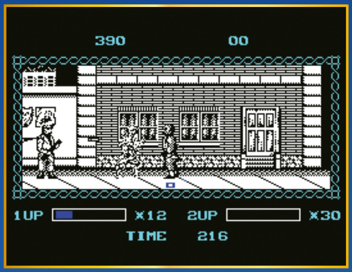
## Atari ST

■ A disappointment after the Amiga version, but only superficially. The graphics have a washed-out feel to them, and the juddery scrolling hampers the gameplay. However, it utilises the same technology as the Amiga called Dynamic Loading System, a direct memory access mode that loads data direct from the disc as the game runs, as a result it retains much of the original's simple-yet-fun gameplay.




## ZX Spectrum

■ The Spectrum port of *Ninja Warriors* lacks the colour of all the other versions, but is otherwise a respectable attempt at bringing the arcade game to the home computer. Alas, it does suffer from the problem that many monochrome games have, in that it is often difficult to spot what's going on, or, more importantly, spot those dangerous bullets. Still, there's an impressive tank boss complete with turret gunner.







## Mega-CD

■ This is an excellent conversion. While the screen is more cramped than in the other home ports, the Mega-CD iteration is marginally faster and heaps more fun as a result. But perhaps the best feature is the game's ease: knives have a better range and the hit detection veers more to the generous side. Given the extra capacity, the excellent soundtrack is a given, but this is still the best home conversion of *The Ninja Warriors*.




## TurboGrafx-16 / PC Engine

■ Turbografx *Ninja Warriors* is an oddity. The graphics are reasonable, although the backgrounds are a little bland and there's occasional flicker when multiple sprites appear. Worse, the massive tank (which even made it into the 48k ZX Spectrum version) is missing in the early stages, an odd omission considering the superior power of the console.

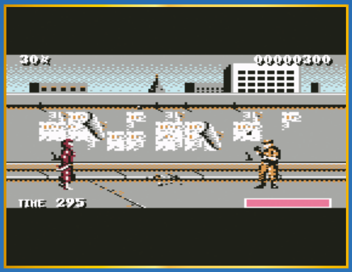
## THE NINJA WARRIORS... AGAIN

**With an identical plot – albeit set in 2035 – this update by Natsumi on the Super Nintendo is everything the original arcade game could – and should – have been, with one unfortunate omission: a co-operative two-player mode.** Otherwise it's a superb game, taking its cue from games such as *Shinobi* and *Bad Dudes*. There are three characters to choose from, each with different qualities and special moves that finally show off the ninjas' robotic origin. Our favourite is the huge ninja who makes up for its sluggish movement with a fantastically cool move, picking up a soldier one handed before flinging him across the screen at his mates. While the overall gameplay breaks little new ground, the addition of proper boss fights and another thumping soundtrack makes this definitely one to check out. Also known as *Ninja Warriors: The New Generation*.



## Commodore 64

■ A predictably superb tune greets C64 owners after a long load, although sadly there's little in-game music to accompany the ninjas. However, this version is streets ahead of the other two 8-bit conversions; lovely smooth scrolling, smart animation and an improved pace help make it a pretty decent game in its own right, with most of its weak points (such as a lack of variety) already present in the arcade original.






» [Arcade] With the lack of a flying kick, jumping is only good for avoiding attacks.

able to move into and out of the playing screen, as well as left and right. We had flying kicks, special moves, platforms to jump onto, ladders to climb and sneering boss battles. *The Ninja Warriors* jettisons all of that, which is especially surprising considering the nature of its protagonists – maybe they're just not programmed that way. The game also lacks an alarming amount of speed as Kunoichi and Ninja stroll across the screen, insouciantly stabbing anyone unfortunate enough to step in their way, with all the urgency of an octogenarian wandering around a garden centre. Yet despite these flaws, it remains a little more than a technical curio, thanks to its impressive graphics, simple gameplay and marvellous music, courtesy of Taito's in-house musical maestro, Zuntata.

**The majority of *The Ninja Warriors* home conversions were handled by The Sales Curve and published by Virgin Interactive.** Cramming three screens into one was no mean feat, although the simplicity of the game helped the coders. Taito released its own home version on the PC Engine around the same time and, bizarrely, a Mega-CD port several years later. Unsurprisingly, given the extra power and storage, the latter version probably edges out all the others, while the PC Engine port is a bit of a disappointment.

Considering the extra expense required for its cabinets, it shocked nobody that very few triple-screen games were created. But for those of you lucky enough to play *The Ninja Warriors* in an arcade, there can be few experiences like taking control of a robot ninja against a vast array of enemies, fighting for liberty and freedom against a totalitarian regime. World leaders beware – the scientists are watching! ★

# 8-BIT NINJAS

**We talk to Robert Whitaker, the man behind the art of the Amstrad and Spectrum conversions of The Ninja Warriors**



**What was your experience prior *TNW*?**
The Sales Curve was my first proper job. Although all my experience was on the Commodore 64, my first task there was the art for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions of *The Ninja Warriors*. It had already begun development when I got there and the guys working on it had done *Silkworm* which was a big hit, and got the company its reputation.

**Which coder did you work with?**
I worked with an external coder called Nigel Brown. All of our collaboration was done over the phone and I never met him in person.

**What did you think of the arcade game?**
It had nice graphics, especially the backgrounds, but it seemed a bit of an uninspiring game to me. The ninjas didn't seem very ninja-like, either – shouldn't robot ninjas be more exciting than this?!

**How did you go about adapting the three screens?**
That was nothing to do with me, the programmers did that. How the conversions were going to look was determined already by the time I joined.

**How do you think you did recreating the look and feel of the arcade machine?**
I thought the graphics on the Spectrum version looked pretty good, a little bland maybe, but they did the job. The black-and-white monochrome was necessary as it had sprites overlaid on a scrolling background, but it had a certain aesthetic that was pleasing. But I wish I'd added some outlines to make the sprites stand out more against the background. Ultimately what hurt the game was the slow speed it ran at.

**Were there any particularly troublesome issues during the development period?**
The only problem for me was having to use the horrible Amstrad colours. The graphics on the Amstrad version were embarrassingly bad due to its palette. I'm sure the programmers would have something to say about having to move that tank across the screen.

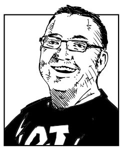
**Why were the developers credited as Random Access?**
We all worked for The Sales Curve, and I guess the name was changed to that because it doesn't sound much like a computer game company.





# Wizkid

## THERE'S NOTHING SENSIBLE ABOUT THIS SEQUEL



**» AMIGA » 1992 » SENSIBLE SOFTWARE**

One of the reasons I love shoot-'em-up and pinball games is because I'm a huge fan of chasing high scores. I love games that are immediately accessible, and yet offer insane hidden depths once you begin to properly explore them and understand how their mechanics work. It's why I'm such a big fan of *Wizkid*. On the surface it appears blissfully simplistic, but dig a little deeper beneath its gaudy exterior and you'll find a monstrously complex game.

Ultimately it's possible to get a fair way into *Wizkid* with very little effort. Each level has a certain number of bricks, and once they are all cleared, you can move onto the next stage. Sure, you'll need to avoid the many enemies that can be found on each level, but their presence won't offer too much challenge if you're good at action games. Hit the enemies with bricks, however, and you'll discover that you score points. Hit several in a row and you'll receive even more. Defeated enemies will drop bubbles that contain either power-ups – that allow you to juggle balls on your disembodied head or grab individual bricks with your teeth – or liquid, which will turn into notes. Defeat every wave of enemies found on each stage and you'll be rewarded with a large number of coins, which can be used to collect new items. Additionally, complete the notes found in the stave at the top of the screen and they too will turn into coins, giving you even more cash to spend.

*Wizkid* is an exceptionally deep and nuanced game with countless layers of complexity, and I've still not discussed the secret cats that are hidden on each world, or the many quirky minigames that you can discover and play. I'd be loathe to say that *Wizkid* is the greatest game that Sensible Software ever made, but I certainly feel its one of the most creative games that the company released. *Wizkid* is a wonderful mishmash of different genres that's been injected with the sort of surrealism that makes Matthew Smith's games look straight-laced. It might not have been the sequel to *Wizball* that I was expecting but it proved to be even more fun than I'd imagined, and as a teenager with a tiny spending budget: that's what really mattered. *



# Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED




## SEGA MEGA MODEM

**Lucky Japanese Mega Drive owners received downloadable games! Of course, they needed to shell out for a kit at twice the price of a cartridge game, plus a monthly fee of ¥800. Here's what they got in return…**

## PYRAMID MAGIC

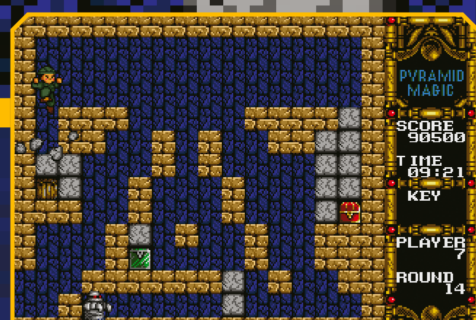
■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA** ■ YEAR: **1991**

■ One theme you'll notice with many of the Mega Drive's downloadable games is that they're pretty simple. Of course, they had to be – the console's modem worked at 1,200 bits per second, the speed which reintroduced loading times not seen since the days of games on cassette tapes. Worse yet, the Sega Game Toshokan cartridge required to download them didn't have any permanent storage, so you needed to download games from scratch every time you wanted to play them.

It's always nice to see a team making the most of limited resources, and *Pyramid Magic* is a great example of a videogame that does just that. The game, which pits you as an explorer trying to reach the tomb at the centre of a pyramid, is certainly much smaller than the average Mega Drive game in terms of data. The relatively limited set of graphics doesn't change from level to level and there's only one musical theme during gameplay. However, the 40 single-screen puzzle levels it contains can and likely will have you scratching your head for hours.

The key to *Pyramid Magic*'s gameplay is the use of movable blocks. They're versatile tools, which can be stood on, lifted and carried, kicked about and even destroyed. What's more, they're the only thing that will allow your character to duck into small spaces, making them a crucial movement tool. At the same time, they're dangerous – not only do they restrict your jumping height, but if you fall while carrying one you'll be crushed. Much of the challenge of the game is built around moving the blocks in a way that allows you to move around each stage without cutting off your escape route.

Another major component to *Pyramid Magic*'s challenge is the presence of a mummified ghost at the exit of each stage. This antagonistic apparition serves to make sure you complete the second objective of each stage, which involves opening three boxes in order – a wooden crate containing a red key, a red chest containing a green key, and a green chest containing a piece of paper that will dispel the pyramid's curse. Stages are initially simple, but soon require high levels of forethought and advanced knowledge of block placement rules. Thankfully, the game is generous with extra lives and even offers players the chance to skip levels by pressing A and Start, but only a total of three times.




» [Mega Drive] This kung fu stomp allows you to get rid of unwanted blocks. Use it with extreme caution so you aren't left short!

*Pyramid Magic* seems to have been one of the most popular games on the service as it spawned three sequels: *Pyramid Magic Special*, *Pyramid Magic II* and *Pyramid Magic III*. These mostly follow the same gameplay template as the original, but the third adds the complication of an urn full of water, which must be carried to the end of each stage.

If you want to play *Pyramid Magic* today, your best bet is to track down a copy of *Game No Kanzume Vol 1*, a Japanese compilation for the Mega-CD which includes *Pyramid Magic* and its sequels, in addition to other former download games such as *Hyper Marbles*, *Flicky*, *Paddle Fighter* and four of the *Phantasy Star II Text Adventure* games.

# IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

## SOLOMON'S KEY

NES



■ Just like *Pyramid Magic*, *Solomon's Key* requires a lot of block manipulation to pass each stage – however, it also includes extra elements, like enemies, to keep you on your toes. The trade-off is that each block is magically created or removed, negating the hazard of lifting and carrying the wretched things.

## CHUCK ROCK

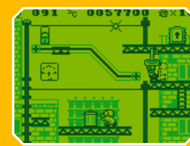
AMIGA



■ For those of you that want to lob heavy rocks at baddies in between puzzle solving, Core Design's second most famous cavern-fancier is the guy for the job. There's definitely a cerebral element to the game, but also some nice, reassuring violence for those who are wary of too much brain activity.

## DONKEY KONG

GAME BOY



■ The reinvention of Nintendo's classic arcade game as a platform-based puzzler was a genius move – not only did it revitalise an older game for a brand-new audience, putting it under the *Donkey Kong* brand provided instant separation from the action-oriented *Super Mario Bros.* series.

# IN DEPTH




### POINT OF NO RETURN

■ *Pyramid Magic* offers plenty of one-way passages. If you've used one and realised you shouldn't have, the only option is to lose a life and start again by pressing C and Start.

### PHARAOH'S TREASURE

■ Chests must be opened on every level, and in the correct order. However, not every chest in the game can be opened – some are actually a tease for the sequel...

### HALF MEASURES

■ Although levels are designed on a strict grid, blocks can actually be placed on the halfway point between spaces, allowing you to create staircases and other structures.

### SQUASH IT DOWN

■ Our little adventurer can't duck at all on his own, so he relies on carrying heavy blocks to get his body into a suitably compact form for squeezing through small tunnels.

# Minority Report

## IKASUZE! AI NO DOKI DOKI PENGUIN LAND MD

■ PUBLISHER: **SEGA** ■ YEAR: **1992**

■ **We haven't done any research to confirm this, but we'd suspect that most gamers outside of Japan don't know that *Penguin Land* was a trilogy – and that's if they're even aware of the comparatively widely-known Master System version in the first place.** That's something that can easily be forgiven, though. The first game came out on the SG-1000 and MSX, platforms of limited note in Western markets, and the final one for the Mega Drive was released primarily as a download.

That's a shame, because this cute little puzzle-platformer might be infuriating, but it's also really quite good. As in the previous games, your goal is to drop an egg safely through downward-scrolling stages – this means not letting it fall too far, not falling on it when it can't roll away, not letting it get crushed by mechanical spikes, and definitely not letting any angry polar bears near it. Luckily, your penguin has the ability to manipulate blocks in the stage – there are movable stone ones, ice blocks you can peck through, and even cracked blocks which only temporarily break your egg's fall. You can even fight back against the polar bears by crushing them or dropping them into a pit, though this is rarely a key requirement for most stages.

Though the visuals are pretty simplistic, they easily eclipse those of the previous games in the series. The important thing is that the gameplay is tightly designed though, and this is the case – in fact, we'd go so far as to say that it could easily have made for a nice budget release on cartridge. As it stands, though, your best way to play this now is to find a copy of *Game No Kanzume Vol. 2* for the Mega-CD.






» [Mega Drive] Get to the bottom and the egg will open, revealing… a flower?



» [Mega Drive] This penguin has a beak of steel, how else will it be able to peck through solid ice?

## MORE GAMES TO PLAY



### » 16 TON

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Your new computer program is full of bugs, and there's only one way to fix it – get inside the thing and squash the errors with enormous 16-ton weights. You fight a few varieties of enemy creatures on infinitely-scrolling platform stages, and must eradicate a set number of waves to move onto the next level. Simple stuff, but it's fun to rack up a high score multiplier by smashing half a dozen baddies with one well-judged throw.



### » AWORG: HERO IN THE SKY

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

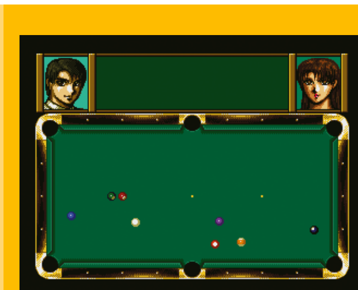
■ This unique hero isn't directly moved by the player – rather, you determine where he waves his inexplicably powerful hand fans, and the resulting airflow moves him around. It'll also move enemies, which can be blown out of Aworg's path or even into spikes. While the game won't win any awards for beauty, the unique gameplay is enough to make it worth trying out.



### » HYPER MARBLES

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ This bizarre hybrid of *Robot Wars* and sumo wrestling casts you as the controller of a mono-wheeled vehicle, and gives you the goal of shoving other such vehicles into electrified barriers. Spice is provided by the presence of differently-sized vehicles, from tiny to huge, alongside a range of hazards including bumpers and slippery surfaces. The winner is the last person left alive – not that that's an easy thing to become.



### » KISS SHOT

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1992**

■ It's a pool game with a weird name, and one which definitely works better as part of a content bundle than it would have done as a standalone cartridge. It's just hard to forget that *Side Pocket* exists, and neither the music nor the ball physics in Sega's low-rent version match up particularly well with Data East's game. This is likely what kept the game off of all of the *Game No Kanzume* collections – it's just not too great.

# SONIC ERASER

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA** ■ YEAR: **1991**

■ **This puzzle game is historic for one major reason: it's the first ever *Sonic* spinoff game.** This isn't common knowledge, though, because Sega doesn't seem particularly keen to remember it and even the few Japanese fans that did happen to play it didn't bother to say a whole lot about it.

As in many puzzle games, blocks fall from the ceiling in groups and it's your job to match their colours so that they disappear. In this game matching a pair will do just fine, so it's very easy to create chain reactions, which will cause Sonic to run over and spin attack or punch the other player's Sonic. Once that happens, they'll lose control over their blocks for a short time. As you'd expect, the game is over when your board is filled.

It's easy to think that dodgy games with Sonic's face on them are a relatively recent development. However, *Sonic Eraser*'s puzzle mechanics are pretty half-baked, and not assisted in the slightest by the accompanying ear-grating music. The graphics don't help either – they're pretty dull even by the standards of puzzle games. It's fair to say that this didn't set a high bar of quality, and that's a shame, but Mega Drive modem owners did at least have access to *Columns*. So whenever you look at *Sonic The Hedgehog* and wonder what ridiculous thing he'll be doing next, remember that it all started with *Sonic Eraser*.

> **"It's fair to say that this didn't set a high bar of quality, and that's a shame"**







» [Mega Drive] Here's some Sonic-on-Sonic violence, present only because the deserving target, Shadow, had yet to be created.

## RETRO STINKER

### » ROBOT BATTLER

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA** ■ YEAR: **1991**

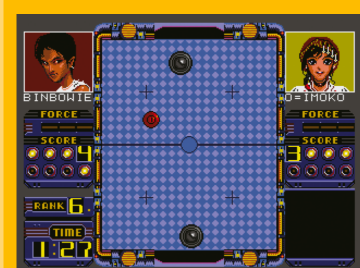
■ Even if you can understand the menus and build a strong robot, this top-down portrayal of mechanised combat is too slow, dull and basic to hold anyone's interest for more than a moment.




## » MEDAL CITY

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

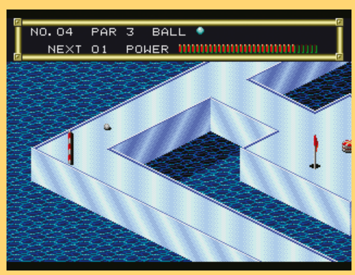
■ This little casino compendium offers you three games to try out: poker, blackjack and slots. These are relatively simple, no-frills implementations of each game, but they're certainly fun little time-wasters for anyone who loves gambling without the potential to win any money. If you can grind your way up to the magic 100,000 medal mark, you'll receive a special ending sequence for your trouble, so long as you aren't playing poker.




## » PADDLE FIGHTER

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ This air hockey game delivers all the fun you'd expect, but with a couple of twists. For a start, you get additional powers here, such as the ability to trap the puck for a better aim, or shield your goal against incoming shots. However, over time both players' goals will widen, ensuring that the game comes to a timely end even with two equally skilled competitors. Of course, you can also battle the CPU if you're antisocial.




## » PUTTER GOLF

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Remember *Putt & Putter*? Two different isometric crazy golf games for the Master System and Game Gear bore that name, and *Putter Golf* is apparently the game that started the whole miniseries. Like its successors, it quickly gives up on providing easy introductory courses and cranks up the sadism – outlandish hazards like bumpers, ice and lava add immense frustration to what is otherwise a peaceful, tranquil sport for gentlemen.



## » TEDDY BOY BLUES

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Based on the infinitely-scrolling platform shoot-'em-up from the Eighties, the Mega Drive version of *Teddy Boy Blues* is prettier than both the arcade original and its Master System conversion. The general lack of depth is offset by a neat high score mechanic, in which defeated enemies turn into points pickups – you'll get an amazing score if you can manage to pick up over five in quick succession. Play it on *Game No Kanzume Vol 2*.

# Future Classic

*Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come*




### Info

» **Featured System:** PC
» **Year:** 2012
» **Developer:** Arkane Studios
» **Key People:** Harvey Smith, Raphael Colantonio, Viktor Antonov

### Go Deeper

» One of the stealth powers cut from *Dishonored* let you transform into a shadow and move along walls.

» If you kill the man who delivers propaganda broadcasts during one of *Dishonored*'s missions, his voice will be replaced by that of Carrie Fisher.



» [PC] You can find beauty even in a place as downtrodden and bleak as Dunwall City.




# 62. DISHONORED

***This sneaky assassination sim connects past with present, infusing a genre that felt like its heyday was over with new ideas and vigour – ensuring that legacy lives on into the future***

## THE BACKGROUND

The debt that *Dishonored* owes to the *Thief* series is obvious – you can tell by taking a cursory look at it. Stalking through the shadows of the Victorian-inspired steampunk city of Dunwall, where magic and machinery coexist, you can't help but be reminded of Garrett's stealthy adventures in the original *Thief* games – where the supernatural and the technological were also happy bedfellows.

It's not those superficial similarities that are most important, though. What is significant about *Dishonored* is that it takes as its guiding principle the design philosophy that accounts for *Thief*'s true appeal. It's also there in *Deus Ex*, a game that codirector Harvey Smith and technical designer Ricardo Bare worked on previously. That is, the privileging of player freedom above all else. Those games represent a golden age of immersive PC RPGs that gave the player the tools to approach each objective in the way they saw fit. They encouraged you to push at boundaries, gave you the freedom to ignore what characters told you to do, and would adapt and reform the experience around your choices whenever possible.

*Dishonored*'s great achievement is to recapture the spirt of those titles and deliver a modern interpretation true to the philosophy of the great player-driven RPGs.

## THE GAME

In *Dishonored*, you take on the role of an assassin who has been granted supernatural abilities by a mysterious figure called The Outsider. With a blade in one hand, and a pistol, crossbow, or one of those powers equipped in the other, you are tasked with taking down a different target in each stage.

These play areas are relatively small, but they are packed with possibilities that make you feel free in a way open-world games 100 times the size could only dream of. At a basic level, you always have a choice between stealth and violence. This applies to every guard and NPC you encounter, but also extends to your primary targets. Not only can you discover more intricate and subtle ways of killing them than with a blade across the throat, you can always find a non-lethal option to neutralize them too. When it comes to navigation, there are many different routes to take – balconies and rooftops to hop between, windows left tantalisingly ajar, abandoned buildings



» [PC] The Outsider can transport you to a strange alternate dimension where everything is seemingly under his control.

**"Arkane found that players would combine powers in ways that hadn't initially foreseen"**



» [PC] Admiral Havelock, one of the conspirators helping you get revenge, practices his aim.

that circumvent guard patrols, if only you can find the key to the front door. Along the way, you'll overhear conversations that point towards new options, find notes that offer clues about hidden loot, encounter characters that offer you deals you can choose to honour or break. These routes and the opportunities you discover within them often intertwine, splitting off and rejoining to form an intricate tapestry weaved from choice and possibility. This means that you never feel like you are following a preprescribed path – a binary choice of this route or that – but instead, are carving your own unique way through the world.

Crucial to making the myriad paths and possibilities presented to you such a joy to prod at and play with is *Dishonored*'s most important power: Blink. Blink allows you teleport over a short distance, making it quick and easy to warp up onto a rafter, across a corridor, through a window, or down behind an unsuspecting guard. Not only is it inherently fun to be able to zip around the world in such a fashion, it encourages exploration. Picking your way across the rooftops and spot something down below that piques your interest? Why not go and check it out? With Blink, you should have no problem finding a way down to investigate and need not worry about permanently abandoning the stealthy rooftop route you discovered, as you would in other games. Blink gives you a way to get back up there and resume your infiltration.

Then there are the rest of *Dishonored*'s brilliant roster of powers. There's an ability that allows you to possess animals and guards, one that lets you slow time, powers that enhance your combat abilities, and more. What's great about them is that, like Blink, they are not only fun to use, but create interesting gameplay possibilities. Indeed, during development, Arkane found that players would combine powers in ways that hadn't initially foreseen. You can, for example, stop time after a guard has fired a bullet, possess him, move him in front of the bullet, then restart time to have him killed by his own shot. It's a testament to the kind of game *Dishonored* is that Arkane didn't try to shut down these unforeseen avenues of play, but did their upmost to support that kind of player creativity instead.

## WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

The games that tend to stick in our memory when we look back on videogame history are those that were able to offer us something we hadn't seen or felt before. *Dishonored* does that. Sure, it takes influence from the likes of *Thief* and *Deus Ex*, but it is no mere copycat. Its combination of clever supernatural abilities combine with intricate level design to create an experience that feels like nothing else out there.

Perhaps more significant, though, is the fact that *Dishonored* highlights some of the best of what this medium is capable of. What makes videogames unique is that they give us agency. This is a game that understands that, indeed, embraces it as a guiding principle. You are encouraged to be creative, to test the boundaries of what is possible. That is what makes it one of the best RPG sandboxes we've ever had the pleasure of playing in. *

## Things of note

### A BEATING HEART



You carry with you a heart that you can reveal secrets about people and locations. It's a great narrative device that reveals an extra layer of Dunwall's inequality.

### THE GOLDEN CAT



This mission is a great early showcase of what the game can do, full as it is of different routes and approaches to taking down your two targets.

### HIDDEN CHARMS



The aforementioned Heart can also be used to help you discover hidden Runes and Bonecharms across Dunwall – use these to upgrade your powers and abilities.

### OPPORTUNITY AWAITS



Explore and you might find unique opportunities to deal with your targets, including poisoning, steaming, or branding.

### THE MASKED BALL



One of the game's best missions sees you attend a masked ball. You must search for clues to work out behind which mask your target hides.



» [PC] *Dishonored* opts for a caricatured version of reality, a stylistic choice that means it will age better than many of its contemporaries.



» [PC] If you're going for a lethal playstyle, high places are perfect for ambushes: you can perform aerial assassinations with ease.

THE MAKING OF

# STARC

## It was the game that solidified Blizzard as a reputable developer and is now getting an exciting new remaster. Adam Barnes discovers how this pinnacle RTS came to be

**No one could deny the impact that *StarCraft* had on the games industry.** Whether you found yourself Zerg-rushing other players online, played it years later after the fact, or never even so much as looked at a screenshot of the game, there is still one thing to be certain of: you *know* this game. *StarCraft* is a game that has become synonymous with RTS games and, at a time when developers were still trying to figure out exactly what could be done with the genre, it was a galvanising title that helped to stabilise many of the mechanics we've come to expect from real-time strategies. Even now, so many games that are released owe Blizzard's sci-fi RTS credit, and it would perhaps be safe to assume – in hindsight – that the developer had intended for this all along. Here was an up-and-coming company making a name for itself: *Warcraft* had been released, its more-important sequel was due to hit the shelves, and even *Diablo* was on the way. But Blizzard was still a small-time company then, working on a budget just so it could keep its doors open; it didn't have the resources it has today and it sure as hell wasn't intending for *StarCraft* to be the game to change all that.



» [PC] The very first build of StarCraft was little more than a garishly-coloured space version of *Warcraft*: 'Orcs in space', essentially.

"Well, we had just finished work on *Warcraft II*," remembers Patrick Wyatt, one of the key programmers on *StarCraft*, "it was a product that ran late. And immediately afterwards there was a desire to continue the franchise and to find ways to pay for all of the salaries of the people who were still working." Patrick alludes to the vast difference between the industry then and the industry now, suggesting that the numbers of sales was often so much smaller than they are today, and it was tougher to get by. "So there was a desire to get back to the next project," he adds. "And so the idea was that some people were going to go off and start another project and then some of the people who were not the leads on *Warcraft II* were gonna become leads on *StarCraft*. *StarCraft* was envisioned as a sort of an expansion set, and this is how we described it internally… except it was going to be a standalone expansion set. So it wouldn't reinvent everything, and it would be done in 12 months." This was 1995, with a planned release of 1996; a date the game would not hit.

The game's sci-fi theme was intended from the start, says Patrick, explaining that having already covered fantasy with two releases of *Warcraft* it was now the time for something different. With *Command & Conquer* having found huge success with its

# Factions Of StarCraft

**The major players in the war for the galaxy**






## Protoss

■ If Terrans are the representatives of everything a human race often represents in a game, then the Protoss are their exact binary opposite. They are warriors as much as the Terrans, but they are stoic and steadfast in their ways. Centuries earlier they were the target of the Xel'naga – considered in game to be essentially creators of planets and often races residing on them – which wanted to help create a race with "purity of form". This lead to the Protoss gaining powerful psionic abilities.









## Terrans

■ Though they're never referred to as such, this is the classic Human race for *StarCraft*. Descended from the humans that sought to colonise the universe after arriving on Supercarriers, these Terrans went on to take over three different planets. Other than their capability for psionic powers, Terrans are similar to any stereotypical human race: industrious, concerned of expansion and cursed by morality. But equally they care for personal freedom and expression, a feature not shared by *StarCraft*'s other races.



## Zerg

■ These bug-like creatures are driven by a search for genetic perfection, able to assimilate advanced species across the universe and use their beneficial genetic code to evolve themselves into better forms of themselves. The same Xel'naga that wanted to improve the Protoss did so with the Zerg, instead aiming to achieve their exact opposite: "purity of essence". The Zerg are fearless hunters and – as their moniker as "the Swarm" suggests – are capable of producing huge, symbiotic armies.

# Know Your Unit

The troops that you will find on the interplanetary battlefield

## Protoss

### Zealot



■ Of the early game units, the Zealot is by far one of the most threatening, with the Protoss often relying on these troops for early harassment.

### Archon



■ While these units are expensive – and awkward – to produce, they can be beneficial if only because of their resistance to a number of abilities.

### Dragoon



■ Despite their downsides, the Dragoon is an effective anti-air unit long into the late game, especially against the bigger aircraft of other factions.

### Corsair



■ This handy air unit might not be effective against a lot of armoured units, but their Disruption Web will make them useful at most stages of the game.

### Reaver



■ This is the heavy artillery of the Protoss army, with enough damage and range that it can deal with packs of units and defensive structures with relative ease.

### High Templar



■ Despite being the only way to produce Archons, these units can also create hallucinations, helping to sow confusion and frustration into the enemy.

## Terran

### Medic



■ No human race faction is without its medic, and the Terrans are no different. You'll find a handful of these embedded into any Terran army.

### Goliath



■ These bipedal mechs are primarily used for their extremely effective anti-air capabilities, but they can be paired with other ground units for overall safety.

### Siege Tank



■ While a decent unit in its own right, the long range of this tank in siege mode is often a useful strategy for defence and – when used properly – attack.

### Vulture



■ These hit-and-run units are typically used for scouting or hunting down any wandering enemy units, and in packs they can be a nuisance.

### Battlecruiser



■ The Battlecruiser is the strongest unit in the game – at least in terms of HP alone – and is a considerable threat as a result.

## Zerg

### Larva



■ These inconspicuous units are the foundation of the Zerg faction, ultimately evolving into and becoming whichever unit it is ordered to become.

### Zergling



■ The iconic staple of the Zerg race, this unit helped coin the term 'Zerg rush', a tough early-game strategy that was difficult to overcome.

### Hydralisk



■ As the only Zerg unit that can attack air units from the ground, these are quite obviously common in any non-Zerg-versus-Zerg games.

### Ultralisk



■ These are the big bad boys of a Zerg army, often being used – despite their slow speed – to launch an assault followed up by swarm of other units.

### Queen



■ While this support unit has no attack, it can be a pain if its Spawn Broodling ability – which destroys the unit to spawn two Zerg units – is used on a target.




» [PC] The Zerg were in fact a precursor to *Warcraft III*'s Scourge faction, both races relying on tainting the ground to build structures.




» [PC] The pre and post-mission dialogue didn't match the punch of the CGI videos, but helped to flesh out the characters all the same.

> **"We were gobsmacked; we had been duped into rebooting StarCraft"**
> Patrick Wyatt

modern military setting, it was clear there was one option for Blizzard from the start – and so initially 'Orcs in space' was the driving goal for the game. "It was sort of like re-envisioning what would happen if the world of *Warcraft* just went into space," Patrick says, "and so the perspective was the same, the art style was a bit different." Gone was the natural greens and browns of fantasy-fuelled *Warcraft*, instead here Blizzard opted for something more space-like – a horrific blend of putrid pinks, bright blues and garish greens. It stood out, for sure, but not in a good way. Lucky, then, that Blizzard found itself the victim of trade show disaster as the team attended E3 1996 to discover that no one was a fan of what would be the company's next game.

It was a defining moment for *StarCraft*, one that – for as disheartening as it was – bolstered the team. But the real issue was not the negativity that it was met with but, instead, the competition that Blizzard found itself facing. One game in particular, Patrick recalls, was enough to earn the developer some humility: *Dominion Storm*. "It was just down the hall from us and it had a full isometric perspective, it had a creature that looked like a *Star Wars* AT-AT walking around, and it just looked impressive in terms of the technology and the artwork, and made us feel embarrassed that we were even on the floor." Patrick explains that the team went back to the drawing board after that, it reset the development progress and really had to work hard to make this a title that would stand out in the way that they presumed



» [PC] The earlier missions gave a lot of leeway in how your base took shape, but later levels could really kick your ass.



» [PC] The game featured some excellent set-pieces, such as when this swarm of Zerg made you panic right before the Dropships came in.

*Dominion Storm* would. "It was really that we no longer wanted to do something that was just going to be an expansion," says Patrick when asked of the sorts of changes they wanted to bring to *StarCraft* after their E3 showing, "it was to do something that was going to be epic in every sense in the same way that *Warcraft* was endeavouring to push on every single bound. If we're going to do a space-based RTS, we wanted it to be really credible and something that players would just love and something that we would be proud of. And so there wasn't an official design of what we had to do, it was more like 'we just need to change everything'."

**But what was most fascinating of all was the real truth of the situation.** That *Dominion Storm* – the game that had been such a decisive reason that Blizzard was knocked off its feet and forced the dev team into overhauling everything – would go on to release roughly a month after *StarCraft*. A game so seemingly robust and ready to go at E3 1996 would still take longer to develop and release. The issue, it turns out, was with problems at Ion Storm, but there was a bigger surprise for Patrick and the team at Blizzard. "As Ion Storm started to disintegrate due to financial and political problems," explains Patrick, "members of its development teams left to pursue other opportunities. From this crew, Blizzard managed to hire Mark Skelton and Patrick Thomas for the company's then-burgeoning cinematics team, where they worked to produce some of Blizzard's epic cutscenes. At some point I talked with Mark and Patrick about how *Dominion Storm* knocked us on our heels, and they let us in on Ion Storm's secret: the demo was a prerendered movie, and the people who showed the 'demo' were just pretending to play! It would be an understatement to say that we were gobsmacked; we had been duped into rebooting *StarCraft*."

## The Birth Of Esports

### How StarCraft helped launch a phenomenon

**Of the 9.5 million sales that *StarCraft* garnered, 4.5 million of that were sold in Korea.** That's perhaps testament to how revered the game became, especially since Patrick Wyatt explains that there was a prediction of only 4,000 sales for the region for Blizzard. It was a perfect storm for the developer, though: the country was suffering an economic recession and so people would find themselves at PC bangs (a LAN gaming center) to use the computer to apply for work and send emails, ultimately ending up spending extra time there playing games.

*StarCraft* launched around this time, and the ease with which Battle.net made it to get online meant that it was a popular choice for people to play with their friends. Its popularity quickly grew until it became a sensation for the country, taking it by storm as millions of players went online to play against one another. Before long, people were devoting their entire lives to it and, having seen the craze, stores and event organizers would host competitions to make the most of the game's insane and sudden popularity. It ended up becoming a lifestyle for the country, and an industry formed around the competitive side of the game – replete with superstar players. It would take years before the West would catch up with Korea's industry surrounding esports, but it certainly set the standard for how such events should be handled.

Yet while this faked E3 presence from *Dominion Storm* may have fooled even reputable game developers, it was a catalyst that ultimately led to a renewed vigour for the *StarCraft* project. What was once intended as a quick title intended to fill a gap in Blizzard's release schedule turned into the sort of epic release we've now come to expect from the developer. "What actually happened was that we were then buried in building *Diablo* at the time," says Patrick. Blizzard North was nearing completion of its genre-making action RPG, and it needed a strike team to help things along so that it would reach its targeted release date. "A large percentage of Blizzard staff actually started helping out on that, until finally around December of 1996 basically everybody at Blizzard was not working on *StarCraft*

# Winning Strategies

Tried-and-tested tactics that will give you an edge

## Protoss – The Reaver drop



### Need a lift?

■ Reavers are one of the more important units in the Protoss arsenal, but they're slow moving and can receive damage before even managing to achieve their potential. Resolve this by building Shuttles and have them always travel around the map in these transports.



### Pack Zealots

■ Depending on the stage of the game, stuff about four to six Reaver units into Shuttles and accompany them with a couple more shuttles filled with weaker units, such as Zealots. These will be used to distract fire from the Reaver units themselves.



### Burn it all down

■ Once ready, guide the Shuttles towards the enemy base. Drop all the units (taking care to place Reavers behind the Zealots) and have them target important structures or enemy units. Zealots on the workers, Reavers on anything of a more significant threat.

## Terran – Walling in



### Get building

■ Walling in is a useful strategy for Terrans on maps with ramps, since it gives them the opportunity to defend against early rush tactics. You'll need to build your first Supply Depot and your Barracks, though this obviously depends on the position of the ramp your defending from.



### Airtight seal

■ Up against the Protoss you'll need to build your Supply Depot so it touches the top or the right-hand side of the Barracks. Against the Zerg you'll need to make sure your Barracks touches the bottom of a Supply Depot or the top and left side of a Factory.



### Human shield

■ If you're not yet ready with your wall and you scout a bunch of Zerglings (smaller Zerg units) heading your way, then try placing an SCV or two within the gaps of your wall. This will block any deficiencies in your wall and give you that extra defence.

## Zerg – The rush



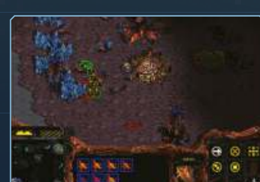
### Mine away

■ It's the classic *StarCraft* strategy, so you should know how to do it from its name alone. Construct a fifth and sixth Drone and have them collect minerals. Once you have 200 minerals, have the last Drone to drop the resources into the base mutate into a Spawning Pool.



### Send a scout

■ While you're waiting for the resources, send your slow-moving Overlord off to hunt for the enemy base and – if you find it – keep it there to keep an eye on what your opponent is doing. In the meantime, birth another Overlord and hatch three pairs of Zerglings.



### Send a swarm

■ As soon as they're ready, send your Zerglings over to the enemy base and have them all attack the same workers at the same time. If you're quick and effective enough you'll put a significant dent in your opponent's economy and you'll essentially have already won the game.



▶ anymore and, in fact, I had moved up to Blizzard North temporarily and I was working on a bunch of stuff and had written the core of the game installer. But I had so much to do that I was like, 'I need some help on this,' and so Bob Fitch [technical director on the game], the last person to be working on *StarCraft* ended up finishing the installer for me. We had zero people on *StarCraft*, so after *Diablo* shipped we were like 'Oh, yeah, this *StarCraft* game, we should get back to that.'" It was during this time that Bob Fitch had in fact rewritten the entire game engine. Utilising the time where so few developers were working on *StarCraft* meant that he was afforded the opportunity to recreate everything, to create a engine that could introduce all the features that they couldn't with the old, 2D *Warcraft* engine.

"January of 1997 was the reset," says Patrick, "and it was, 'Okay, let's rebuild everything. We need to recontrol our design decisions'. Although tragically because it was like, 'Well, now the project's late so we need to move fast,' and so there were things that we didn't do that we probably should have done at that point. More specifically, one of the biggest pain points that we had from the entire duration of the development was that we had a top-down 2D tile-map game with isometric tiles on top of it, instead of making an isometric tile engine game which made everything else much harder. It made creating the artwork harder, it made pathfinding and AI, in particular, much harder because when you have a diagonal line that's decomposed to these squares, everything becomes kind of jaggy. The pathfinding, as evidenced by the way the Dragoons work, was just a big problem." Despite the workaround, it was enough to give the *StarCraft* team the opportunity to turn the game around, to make something special. The "Orcs in space" concept was ditched and Chris Metzen – one of the most important



» [PC] It's a credit to the artists of the time that they could make such tiny sprites all look identifiable across all three factions.



» [PC] In story missions, those who explored the map were rewarded with additional – sometimes otherwise-inaccessible – units to add to their army.

figures for all of Blizzard's fictional universes – came in to create something that was compelling. This meant three different factions to play as, each playing very distinctly from one another.

**"Suddenly, when we looked back at *Warcraft II*, one of the things that was clear after the fact was that the sides were very much a chess piece-like balance, where they're very much interlocking with each other.** And it's well balanced but primarily because the units are very similar to one another across both sides," Patrick says. And that was true of most RTS games at the time. While the precursor to the RTS genre was *Dune II*, it was only Westwood's follow up – the much more renowned *Command & Conquer* – that offered a glimpse at differences between two playable factions. And even then the differences were minimal. "So we wanted to do something where we could do more of a rock-paper-scissors for races and for units," explains Patrick, "and just be creative and breakout of the chessboard mentally. So three races appealed to us, and then we didn't see the necessity of going with four. We only had so many people and so much time that if you try and spread your ideas over more races then your ideas are going to be thinned out too much."

With the core elements of the game set, development would roll on for almost a year more, releasing in March of 1998 after much of the team had worked extremely long crunch hours throughout its duration; it was, after all, intended to have been released by 1996. But this rushed work didn't stop the need for quality, and Blizzard – staying true to the developer's approach as much then as it does now – knew it was better to delay a great game than release an unfinished one. This meant there was always room for improvements and innovation, and with the rise of CGI it was clear that Blizzard wanted to be at the forefront of this new approach to storytelling if it was to truly present something that felt believable. "We were certainly looking a lot at what other game companies were doing and being inspired by what they did ," admits Patrick, "and so it was always a question of how can we take this stuff and go to the next level. I mean we had started with *WarCraft* I doing cinematics with just two people, and it was amazing for its time and the limited resources. It was all put together in 8-12 weeks by two people for *WarCraft*, and we started having more and more cinematic artists join and create things that were really impressive in a way that they extended the game. They told a story and they created a reward for people who played to the game to really get into the world, and not just the gameplay: there was this believable world behind it and so it just seemed really natural to continue that." It's easy to look back on a title like *StarCraft* from a developer now so successful it is freed of many of the pressures that most other game developers struggle with and believe it never had to suffer such situations but back then, before the turn of the millennium, Blizzard was still working hard to make ends meet. It hadn't yet released *World Of Warcraft*, and, despite its rising popularity and a secure fanbase, there was still a need to be restrictive. "I will say that we did only have a really small cinematics team that did all that stuff," Patrick says, "learning the tools – inadequate tools – and discovering how, on a budget, to render these scenes. We didn't even have render farms, we sort of built it out of desktops when people weren't using them sometimes. So it was just a huge challenge being so resource constrained in that era."

> **"We were certainly looking a lot at what other game companies were doing and being inspired by what they did"**
> Patrick Wyatt

That devotion ultimately paid off. *StarCraft* was released to immediate success, selling a huge 1.5 million in its first year before going on to achieve 9.5 million copies sold worldwide. Critics praised the title, suggesting it was the standard by which all RTS games will be measured. Today, the concept of a 'Zerg-rush' is still well known and referenced, while design elements of the game – menus, mouse control and the use of distinctive factions – are still prevalent through practically every RTS game since. But more than anything, *StarCraft* is a game that even now has an active player base, a facet helped along by its multiplayer mode that had helped to boost the game's popularity as much in the US and Europe as it did, unexpectedly, in South Korea – where, as a result, the home of competitive gaming was born. Now, Blizzard is remastering *StarCraft*, bringing in up-to-date visuals and HD audio. Considering it's a game that brought RTS gaming to the forefront of the industry, it could do enough to create a resurgence of interest in the franchise. If nothing else, Blizzard is now offering up the unpolished original for free – a chance to relive the classic, regardless of whether you've played it before or not. *



» [PC] The higher clarity visuals of the remaster will help make the game a little more playable in a modern era.






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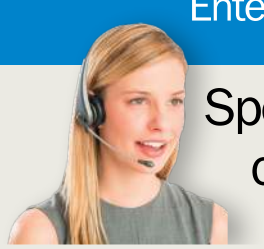
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In the chair with...

# DAVID KELLY

David Kelly spent 20 years writing for, editing and publishing games magazines, breaking big stories throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Paul Drury gets to flick through his back pages

Back when David Kelly joined the emerging world of home computer magazines, home computers themselves were still in their infancy. He spent a fascinating four years on *Popular Computing Weekly* from 1982 to 1986, a time when a new micro seemed to appear every week and games were developing from primitive arcade clones knocked up in bedrooms to major productions selling in their millions. His career would see him take charge of both single-format magazines, like *Sinclair User* and *Nintendo Magazine System,* along with multiformat publications like *C&VG*, finally ending up on the hugely successful website GameSpot UK. "By sheer chance, I got in at the ground floor of a whole new business," says David. "I was carried along by the momentum of it all and had a blast."

**Did you proudly tell the careers teacher at school that when you grew up that you wanted to write about computers and videogames?**
[Laughs]. No, that's not at all how it went! I hadn't a clue what I wanted to do. I just fell into it, really. I studied Physics at university and realised some people were very bright and would get to do the interesting physics stuff and I wasn't one of them. I tried to get into trade magazines and went for an interview at *Concrete Quarterly.*

**Surely that's a made-up magazine?**
No, it's real. And they didn't give me the job. I thought, 'Crumbs, if I can't get a job on *Concrete Quarterly* I'm doomed!' I ended up editing a journal that published academic papers for a few years and then I saw an advert in the *Guardian* newspaper for a reporter on a computer magazine.

**Did you have any experience with computers?**
None at all. I did an O-level in Computing but that was all punch cards and Cobol. I was invited to an interview with a chap called Duncan Scott who had published *Your Computer* magazine and was setting up on his own. I met a lawyer friend of mine in a pub across from where the interview was so she could lend me a smart looking briefcase – so that I would look the part. I wandered across the road but there had been a mix-up with the times and I was an hour late. It turned out all the people who were going to interview me had gone over to the pub and had watched me do my delicate briefcase handover.

**Not a great first impression.**
They came back from the pub to see me and set me the task of going off to interview the man at the BBC responsible for the BBC Micro machine. I had to write a 1,000 words on that, which they were sufficiently happy with – so they not only gave me the job, they published it in the first issue of *Popular Computing Weekly.* I joined the magazine officially for issue two, as their third employee. On my first day, Duncan [Scott] bought me a £30 manual typewriter and everything I wrote for *PCW* was typed up on that. There was no technology there.




**We always liked the full-colour covers you had on the early issues of the magazine.**
Yes, those science fiction covers made the magazine look ritzy, even though inside the paper was just newsprint. We commissioned three or four artists




> "By sheer chance, I got in at the ground floor of the games magazine business and I had a blast"
> David Kelly

In the chair with...

# FIVE TO READ

## The best of Dave's work




### POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY

■ Long before the ubiquitous internet, *PCW* was the go-to source for news on the burgeoning home computer and gaming world. David was there at the start and stayed for the first four years. We especially liked the early airbrushed covers, which managed to make a 1K ZX81 listing seem epic.

### SINCLAIR USER

■ When David joined as editor in 1986 for issue 51, the Spectrum was at its peak and *Sinclair User* was the biggest-selling home computer magazine in the UK. He steered it in a more games-orientated direction, with colourful, image-led features and an editorial tone aimed at the gamer rather than the hobbyist.







### NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM

■ As the Nineties dawned, consoles rather than home computers were increasingly capturing the imaginations of gamers. David oversaw *NMS* (later retitled *Official Nintendo Magazine*), along with Sega Magazine and Megatech, and helped pioneer a more visual approach to games coverage.

### COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES MAGAZINE

■ Having launched in November 1981 as the first magazine devoted to games coverage, *C&VG* was the 'grand old man' of the industry. David joined the magazine in the mid-Nineties, just as the PlayStation and Saturn were starting to make an impression.




GAMESPOT

### GAMESPOT UK

■ These days, the internet is awash with sites covering every aspect of videogaming but when David helped launch the UK version of GameSpot, it was groundbreaking stuff and garnered several prestigious industry awards before being merged together with the parent US site in 2002.

▶ to do them in rotation and they produced A3 airbrushed originals. Unfortunately, after a couple of dozen issues, things weren't going so well for us.

**You mean the magazine almost folded?**
Sales were not going in the right direction and remember, we were only charging 30p an issue! Duncan realised we needed to do something drastic. We were essentially being just like the monthly magazines but publishing four times more frequently. The thing we could do was get the news out there much more quickly. We got rid of the sci-fi covers and put news on the front and became part-news, part-reviews and a fair chunk of listings.

**Type-in listings were a staple of the early games magazines. What was your view of them?**
Well, I didn't have to go through all the submissions personally [laughs], but those listings were a significant factor in creating the UK videogames industry. When home computers were launched, I don't think anyone expected them to be used primarily for consumer games. Certainly Sir Clive didn't! The listings were crucial in showing people 'under the bonnet'.

**You mentioned Sir Clive Sinclair. Did you interview him?**
Oh yes. He was quite a boffin type. I ended up interviewing pretty much everyone. The guys at Acorn, the people making the Dragon in Wales, John Hollis and Nick Lambert at Quicksilva in Southampton… their place was just a terrace house full of jiffy bags. Psion, who were like Sir Clive's trusted developers, were interesting. A lot of very geeky guys who often wandered round with no shoes and socks on. A bright lot. All the [games programmers] were really nice and really excited that this whole thing was lifting off around them.




» David steered *Sinclair User* away from its early 'hobbyist' focus into an unashamed games magazine.

**Were you especially proud of any scoops?**
We were the weekly in the market so we broke most of the news! For three years, we were the main source of industry news, which is why our circulation went up – we became the de facto trade paper. We were covering the retail and distribution stories as well, so we became an essential read for the trade. I do remember we got wind Oric were making a new micro. I found their address through Companies House and just went round to their offices in the East End and hammered on their door. They hardly even had a prototype of their machine at that point, and they were very surprised to see me, but I was ushered into the chief executive's office and we got an exclusive.

**When you moved up from reporter to editor on *Popular Computing Weekly*, did you miss getting out into the industry, meeting the movers and shakers, and sniffing out exclusives?**
There was still only five of us so there was nothing to miss [laughs]! We were all still doing everything and though the company was small, we were also publishing *Commodore Horizons*, *Dragon User*, *Micro Adventurer* and had published over 40 books. We had even started publishing Spectrum games. It was a special time and I was lucky to be involved.

**So why did you leave to join EMAP as editor of *Sinclair User*?**
I had been with the magazine for four years and I think we all thought a fresh eye was a good idea.

**Is it fair to say you steered *Sinclair User* in a more games-orientated direction?**
Yes, that's probably true. There are only so many people who want to take the machine apart and programme it. A much larger group want to just 'plug and play'. At that point, the Spectrum was a mature market. While I was there we did make the magazine a bit less technical and made it more around entertainment. And hopefully the writing became more entertaining, too. We became more of a games review magazine and we were selling an awful lot of copies.

**It became the biggest-selling games magazine in the UK, we understand. Did you feel the pressure of being number one?**
I didn't really have time to feel the pressure. It was long hours and lots of weekends working. That's one of the reasons I wasn't a big games player. I didn't even have a Spectrum at home because there wasn't much home time! It would've felt like a busman's holiday, anyway.

> "I didn't really have time to feel the pressure. It was long hours and lots of weekends working"
> David Kelly

» Popular Computing Weekly soon became the place where big stories first hit the newsstands










## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Treasures from Dave's work

"When I was a reporter for *Popular Computing Weekly*," recalls David, "I was required to write a page and a half of news and do an interview for each issue. I would get on a train and visit someone, take my camera for the photos, develop the film at home in the evening and it would all go in the magazine. I've still got all the negatives I ever took!" **Retro Gamer** is, of course, intrigued by this treasure trove of images from the early days of the home computer industry and David was keen to find a home for this collection. We are delighted to report David now intends to donate the Sunshine Publications archive to the National Videogame Arcade in Nottingham but not before your favourite retro magazine has had chance to scan its contents. We wondered aloud if there might be something really revealing in there, like nude photos of Sir Clive Sinclair. "I'm afraid not," frowns David. "I have got some of him sitting in a C5 but with clothes on."

**Did you ever receive pressure from a publisher to give a game a good review?**
It was not uncommon [laughs].

**Can you name names?**
No, because it was pretty much everyone. It's a perennial problem for any magazine that reviews anything. You get big multinational companies throwing their toys out of the pram, saying, 'You'll never get anything from us again!' It's endless.

**Did you ever tell a reviewer to give a game a better mark than it deserved?**
No, never. If you cave once, you'll be expected to do it next time and there's no way back. To be honest, the games publishers know if a game is any good or not in their heart of hearts. It was usually around games which were linked to other properties, like films. Those games tended to be produced to a very tight deadline, and they were almost universally terrible.

**Plus ça change.**
We'd get grief from the publishers because they, in turn, were getting grief from 20th Century Fox or Marvel or whoever.

**Talking of grief, what did you make of the *Unclear User* pisstake that *Crash!* magazine produced, poking fun at *Sinclair User*?**
That was just before I arrived but I think the powers at EMAP sought an injunction to have it stopped. It was difficult because you can't really have someone parodying your intellectual property but at the same time, responding to it makes you the bad, corporate monster.

**Did you read *Crash!* to keep tabs on the team?**
We were in direct competition with them, so yes, I was interested in what was on their cover and what exclusives they'd got, even if I didn't read it all. They were doing a different thing from us. They were like the 'voice of the street'. They began like a fanzine and that just wasn't us. We were the 'journal of record' [laughs]. We'd been there a long time before they arrived and we didn't intend to be as irreverent as they were. We were coming from a different place. EMAP was a FTSE-listed company and one of the biggest media groups in the country. Some of the things they did, we just couldn't do!

**What are your abiding memories of your two years at the helm of *Sinclair User*?**
Lots of late nights! I remember the games side being very, very competitive. We were scrabbling for every exclusive. The whole thing was really overheated.

**Were you especially pleased to secure the exclusive on any particular game?**
To be honest, the games I remember tend to be just before I started on *Sinclair User*, games like *The Hobbit* and *Ant Attack*… when they came in to the office, our jaws dropped and we just wondered how technically it was possible. Same with Ultimate, when we saw *Jetpac* and *Knight Lore*. It was a step change in terms of quality. Huge sprites! The Stampers came from a background in arcade games and it showed.

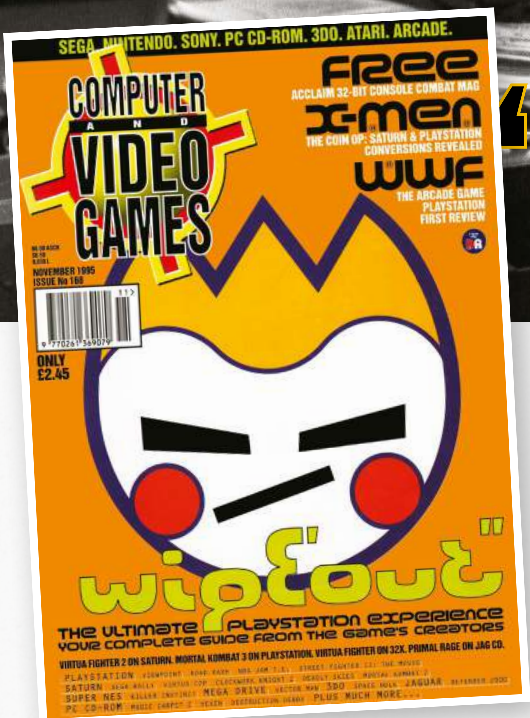
**Did you ever interview Tim and Chris Stamper?**
I think I did. They were the hardest to get to see, without a doubt, though. The anonymity was part of their thing. There was a mystique about them.

**Why did you leave *Sinclair User*?**
I was offered a job as editor of *PC User*. My [team] went from four to 40, if you include all the marketing people. It was the biggest business magazine in the UK by ad revenue. It was a huge challenge. but fun.

**Was it really fun? Didn't you miss the buzz of the games industry?**
I think I was able to bring a bit of the fun of the games magazines to it. Business magazines can be very po-faced, yet the IT guys who were reading *PC User* probably had a Spectrum at some point. I think I managed to 'relax' some of the editorial to make it an easier read. We were based in Clerkenwell [in London] and there was a rave scene going on around that time. We'd be coming in to work on a Sunday morning and there would be all these ravers, staggering out from clubs, who'd not been to bed yet…

**Were you ever tempted to join them, David?**
No, the games industry at that time was based on






» David was heavily involved with relaunching Computer + Video Games while at EMAP. He worked on the mag from 1994-1996.

> C&VG did well when there was an upheaval in the games industry and people were looking for the next machine, the next great game
>
> David Kelly

## SELECTED TIMELINE

**PUBLICATIONS**

- **POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY** 1982-1986
- **SINCLAIR USER** 1986-1988
- **PC USER** 1988-1990
- **WHICH COMPUTER?** 1990-1993
- **NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM** 1993-1996
- **MEGATECH** 1993-1994
- **C&VG** 1994-1996
- **GAMESPOT UK** 1996-2002

booze! Every industry has a drug of choice and in the early days, it was always about going for a pint. At EMAP, we were right next to the City Pride pub and it would be straight out the office, into there. And then a curry. Then to bed and do it all again the next day.

**Though still at EMAP, you do return to games in 1993 when you take charge of *Nintendo Magazine System*. Did it feel like coming home?**
Yes, of course. These were entertainment magazines more than information magazines. And games publishers are a lot more fun than your average PC manufacturer!

***NMS*, along with *Megatech* and *Sega Magazine*, which you also oversaw, rode the wave of the new 16-bit consoles. Did you feel you needed a different approach for these magazines from those based more on home computers?**
Absolutely. The readers were much younger. The core readership was 11-to-16-year-old boys and not much audience either side of that. Plus consoles were closed systems so there was no room for coverage about getting under the bonnet of your machine. The magazines were much more like music magazines where essentially you're reviewing that month's releases.

**They took a more visual approach to covering games. Were you concerned that editorial was being downgraded in favour of pretty pictures?**
Not at all! Pictures are editorial. In fact, EMAP pioneered the 'lots of pictures, few words' style. There hadn't been much point using loads of screenshots in the days of the ZX81 when it was just blobs moving about. As games became more sophisticated, there was a sense you were taking stills, akin to a movie, which of course is the way it's gone. It was a reflection of the audience – they didn't want acres of text, they just wanted to see the games!

**You were then tasked with relaunching the granddaddy of games magazines, *C&VG*. What exactly does a 'relaunch' involve?**
Magazines do get tired. It's like with football clubs: you bring in a new manager to reinvigorate the team. Magazines need to follow the cultural zeitgeist. They have to be modern and look up to date. You soon know if something looks old fashioned. If you look, there must be eight or nine *C&VG* logos over the years. You can instantly tell it's the same magazine but if you compare the first to the last, you'll see how much it's changed.

**Were you proud to become part of the first games magazine in the UK?**
It was great. *C&VG* was the bedrock of games magazine publishing… but it was also problematic because it didn't have an obvious solution to the problem of the runaway success of individual machines.

**Can you explain what you mean by that?**
When everyone had a SNES, they all wanted to read a Nintendo magazine. When I was at *Sinclair User*, the Spectrum was pretty much at its peak so everyone wanted to read about their machine and weren't really bothered about what was happening on the Commodore 64. Of course the problem [for

» As well as having overall charge of *Sega Magazine*, David had considerable input on *Megatech*, which championed the Mega Drive and Mega-CD.




single-format magazines] is when that machine is no longer popular, you no longer have an audience.

**Which is a problem a multiformat magazine like *C&VG* can, of course, avoid.**
Exactly. That's why it survived so long. *C&VG*'s fortunes were cyclical: the stronger the individual platforms were, the weaker *C&VG* was because it covered everything, including what was happening in the arcades. The people who read the multiformat magazines are the real enthusiasts. They are looking for the next thing, the next machine, and that's demonstrated by the next great game. *C&VG* did well when there was an upheaval in the games industry and people were trying to decide what machine to buy next.

**There were big upheavals in the videogame magazine market too in the Nineties, as the internet started to grow exponentially. You left EMAP in 1996 and became the launch publisher of Gamespot UK. Was working on a website very different to working on a games magazine?**
It's completely different. In many ways, it's more difficult. A magazine has a press deadline, either once a week or once a month, and you have a cycle. The first week of a monthly cycle, you can kind of put your feet up and recover from the last issue. Then it winds up into this nightmare at the end of each issue. With a website, you get it and you publish it. You are always on deadline, every hour of every day. The pressure is always there.

**Did you sense the days of printed games magazines were numbered?**
Back then, we thought internet publishing was going to be brilliant because you didn't have all the costs of printing and none of the problems of distributing. We thought, therefore, it had to be more profitable. But it doesn't work like that. You have the costs of all the tech guys who make everything work, and they can be much more expensive than paper, and even to this day, there's the debate about trying to get readers to pay to read content.

**GameSpot UK was very successful and won several awards but then in 2002, it is merged with the US site. How did you feel about this move?**
I thought it was very short-sighted. It's a bit of a dilemma, as it's hard to be successful if all of your content is syndicated. You need content which is specific for the UK and we were generating a lot. Reviews, interviews… and we had a catalogue of 'firsts'. We were the first to have 'buy' buttons, so you could click to buy the game after you had read the review, for example. For a brief moment, the decision was made not to be in the consumer market in the UK and we merged with the main US site. Our site was closed and I was out of a job. They reversed the first part of that decision later!

**After 20 years in games journalism, you must have missed writing about games?**
Well, by that time, I hadn't been writing about them for a long time. I'd become more of a business manager.

**Could you ever be tempted back into writing for or editing a games magazine?**
The industry has changed so much. The most fun was the early days of the industry when no one knew if this stuff could be done, when it was all being made up on the fly. I'm more excited about things that are just starting out. Anyway, I think the days of computer magazines are probably gone. The internet has transformed it. Why would you buy a games magazine anymore?

**Erm, people do buy *our* magazine, David.**
Actually, **Retro Gamer** is the one magazine that makes perfect sense because no one is doing what you're doing! ★

» *Nintendo Magazine System* knew how to appeal to a younger, more visually-orientated audience




## YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

### David taps out the answers on his trusty typewriter

**ERIC: What was the most exciting time of your career in computer and games magazines?**

*Popular Computing Weekly*. Everything was to play for and new machines were coming out all over the place. We didn't know how it was going to turn out and everyone was sticking their toes into games development. Every week there was something different.

**THE LAIRD: What magazine would have liked to have been a part of and why?**

That's tricky because I was a part of quite a lot! Okay, I'll say being on *C&VG* in the very early days. That would've been a lot of fun. It had a real energy and personality. It was a mature publication by the time I got involved.

**MERMAN: Which writers and editors impressed you back then?**

It was the ones that wrote copy which made me laugh. There were a lot of those. Graham Taylor on *Popular Computing Weekly*, and at EMAP, we had some very funny people, like Matt Bettinson on *CU Amiga*, and John Bennett on the PC magazines. Unfortunately, there's a correlation between being funny and difficult…

**MERMAN: Thank you for *PCW*! It was different, gave a lot of space to Interactive Fiction and caught on to the importance of Rob Hubbard tunes.**

That's very kind! Unwittingly, *PCW* played quite a big part in the lives of many people who got into the industry and are still in it today. The people who got fascinated in home computing, the types that built their own ZX81 from a kit, a lot still play games now and are still part of the games business.



» RETROREVIVAL

# Air Zonk

ZONKED OUT

**» PC ENGINE » RED COMPANY » 1992**

There's a lot to like about *Air Zonk*. It's a technically accomplished game, featuring awesome sprite work and some very cool scrolling effects. The weaponry you're given access to is neat as you have shots, charged shots and bombs, and the bosses are very cool. With all that in mind, I want to buy *Air Zonk*. But *Air Zonk*, and the Japanese version *PC Denjin*, aren't cheap in their original HuCard form. Luckily, I remembered it had been released on digital download services too. Problem solved, right?

Wrong. You see, *Air Zonk*'s only European download release was on the Wii Virtual Console, back in 2007. Two generations on, I now have a Nintendo Switch. I can buy Wii Virtual Console games on my Wii U, and money added to my eShop account is valid for Wii U and Switch purchases (as well as the 3DS). But the Switch isn't backwards compatible, and the Wii Shop Channel is completely independent of all that anyway. As a result, I can't use the money that I've already put into Nintendo's online systems to buy *Air Zonk*, and even if I do go to the trouble of acquiring Wii Points, I'll have to keep the Wii U set up in order to play it.

This isn't a Nintendo-specific problem, either. I sign into my PS3 and PS4 with the same account, but only one of them plays my digital library of original PlayStation games. So much for downloadable retro games allowing us to let go of obsolete hardware, eh? *



# RETRORATED



>> This month we take Sony's WipEout remaster for a spin, go head-to-head with Tekken 7 and find out if Eugene Jarvis' collaboration with Housemarque tops Resogun




» [PS4] No matter how hectic the game gets, you'll never see any slowdown.

## **WipEout:** Omega Collection

### A TERRIFIC TRIO OF FAST-PACED FUTURISTIC RACERS TO SHOW OFF THE PS4

**INFORMATION**

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- » **DEVELOPER:** SONY XDEV/ CLEVER BEANS/EPOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2 (2-8 ONLINE)



**There are certain series of games that become a key part of a platform holder's heritage – ever-present entities which help to define the hardware.** An Xbox without *Halo* would feel odd and a Nintendo console without *Mario* is simply incomplete. For the best part of four years the PS4 has been a good console, but one missing a key bit of PlayStation heritage by not hosting a *WipEout* game. The arrival of this compilation is highly welcome as a result, but it has a lot to live up to – Sony's first-party remaster work has a very good reputation, thanks to the likes of *The Last Of Us Remastered*, *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection* and *The Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus Collection*.

The good news is that *WipEout: Omega Collection* is everything that we'd hoped it would be. The game collects the last decade of *WipEout* releases – 2008's *WipEout HD*, the major 2009 expansion *WipEout HD Fury*, and 2012's *WipEout 2048*. Of the three games, it's *2048* that is likely to be unfamiliar to most players, as it had the misfortune of being released for the criminally neglected PlayStation Vita. That game was a prequel, weaving *WipEout*'s anti-gravity raceways through near-future cities with architectural styles that resemble those we live in. The other two originate from the PS3, but in turn drew their content from the PSP games *WipEout Pure* and *WipEout Pulse*.

This compilation is technically immaculate. Just as *WipEout HD* was a showcase for the PS3 hardware, the

» [PS4] The transformation of *WipEout 2048* from a Vita title to a great-looking PS4 game is staggering.







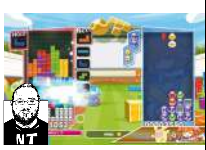

**BRIEF HISTORY**

» *WipEout* took players for an explosive high-speed thrill ride when the PlayStation launched in 1995, and the futuristic racer has been closely associated with Sony's consoles ever since. In recent years, the series has often been used to deliver showcase titles to highlight the technical prowess of PlayStation hardware.

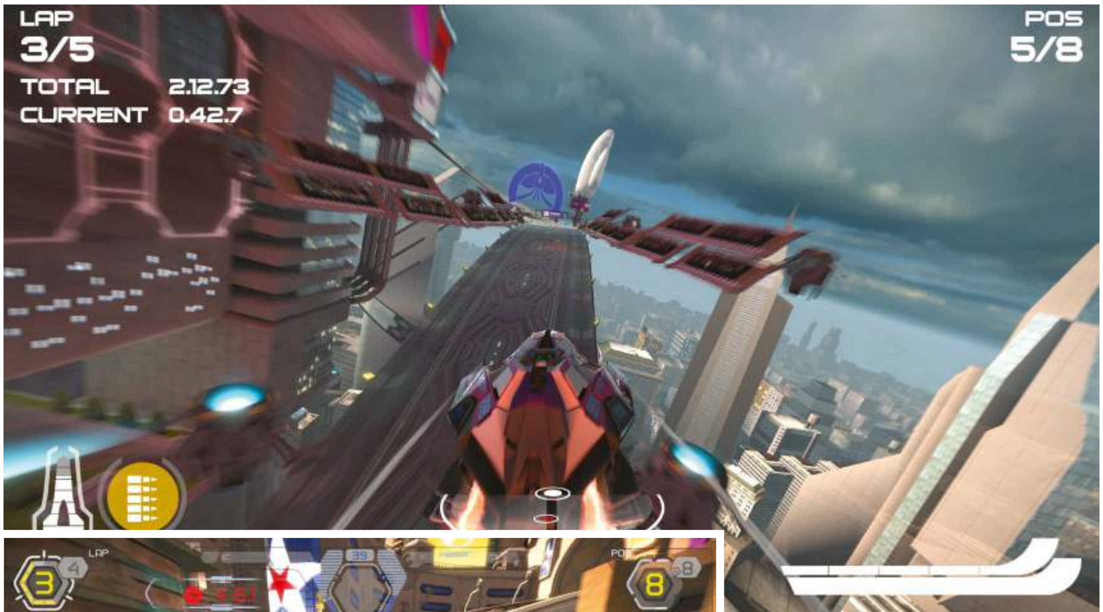
**✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH**



**DARRAN**
**Nex Machina**
Quite possibly the best, most intense twin-stick shooter I've played in the last ten years.



**NICK**
**Puyo Puyo Tetris**
As fun as *WipEout Omega* is, it still can't compare to sitting down at lunchtime and soundly thrashing the guys at this.




» [PS4] The Sol tracks are beautiful sky-high raceways, but without barriers they're also deadly.




» [PS4] This triple rocket blast is a surefire hit – that racer in front is toast.

*Omega Collection* shows the PS4 at peak performance. Despite the game's high-speed racing and weapons-based carnage, the framerate stays locked at 60fps and if you're playing on a PS4 Pro you can experience it all at full 4K resolution. It's obvious that art has been painstakingly reworked to maximise the benefits of this performance, too. You might not notice too much difference between *WipEout HD* and its *Omega Collection* version, especially at 1080p, but *WipEout 2048*'s tracks have had a huge bump in terms of texture quality and reworked trackside detail.

As for the actual gameplay, *WipEout: Omega Collection* benefits from over a decade of refinement. The anti-gravity racers have their classic handling model, with floaty turning that requires deft air brake usage at higher speed classes. Weaponry is present and correct, with items divided into offensive and defensive categories and activated on a per-race basis. As usual, the system favours skilled players – while lagging racers will get better weapons such as lock-on missiles and the classic quake, you never get a sense that you're being punished for being in first place.

*WipEout*'s always been known for being a tricky series and that hasn't changed, but beginners are eased into the game gradually through the campaign modes, which start with simple races and time trials on low speed classes before opening up the fun stuff. Beside the savagery of the faster speeds, you'll get to enjoy fan favourite modes such as Eliminator (destroy other racers to win), Zone (an endurance race with constant acceleration) and Detonator (a shoot-'em-up mode). There's plenty of variety that keeps the game from just devolving into a simple procession of races, and the presence of challenging targets will keep you coming back. Multiplayer is offered in both local split-screen mode for two players and online for up to eight, and with 26 tracks and 46 ships to pilot, you'll be occupied for a long time no matter which mode you prefer.

Ironically, it might be the most dedicated *WipEout* fans who have the least to gain from this compilation as the *WipEout HD*/*Fury* content is now being raced for the fourth time, having already been available on PSP, PS3 and even on Vita as an expansion for *WipEout 2048*. While it's always fun to revisit favourite tracks from the past, a nagging sense of "been there, done that" can creep in when racing these campaigns if you're a series veteran. Still, improved visual fidelity and more active online servers will likely be enough to tempt many experienced anti-gravity pilots over to the latest game, and all will appreciate the chance to experience *2048* on a huge TV without the slowdown that occasionally marred the Vita version.

If you haven't played *WipEout* since the days of the original PlayStation, though, you're in for an absolute treat. *WipEout: Omega Collection* looks absolutely stunning and has an appropriately thumping electronic soundtrack, and the track designs here are among the best ever included in a *WipEout* game. The handling model isn't quite as unforgiving as it was in the Nineties, but unleashing a quake and watching your opponents fly into the air is as satisfying as it ever was, and there's still little that compares to defending your hard-earned first-place finish from a barrage of rockets as the music increases in intensity.

Ultimately, *WipEout: Omega Collection* is the definitive take on *WipEout HD*, *Fury* and *2048*. We just hope that this is proof of concept for a brand-new game soon, because there's only so many times you can blast around Vineta K. ✱

## ✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

**WIPEOUT 3 SPECIAL EDITION** (PLAYSTATION)



▼ SOMETHING NEW

**FORMULA FUSION** (PC)



## In a nutshell

**A generous package, offering a substantial amount of excellent racing content with cutting-edge presentation. This would have been great at full price, so the fact that it's substantially less than that is excellent too.**

>> Score **90%**




» [PS4] *2048*'s environments threw up some unusual graphical challenges – how often do you see grass in *WipEout*?

## ✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

retro GAMER SIZZLER

# Nex Machina

**» System:** PS4 (tested), PC **» Cost:** £15.99 **» Buy it from:** Online

**Effortlessly riffing off *Robotron: 2084, Nex Machina* takes all the elements that have defined 35 years of twin-stick shooting and ramps everything up to 11.** Its power-ups are meaty and incredibly satisfying to use, the level design throughout is exemplary, opening up new areas as waves of cleverly-placed enemies are disposed of, while each and every boss is a work of art, and it even makes sneaky nods to past classic games. And then there's the brilliant dash mechanic, an ability which has been ported across from *Resogun* and allows you to instantly cut through enemies and lasers in your search for stray humans (who boost your multiplier on collection). It dramatically alters the structure of your shooting: allowing you to effectively manage crowds of enemies, or navigate difficult terrain, but it can also land you in even more danger if you make a dash that's a little too desperate. It adds a sense of pace to an already speedy game and is one of the best examples of risk vs reward that we've recently encountered.

There's also endless potential for racking up high scores, thanks to the clever multiplier system and numerous difficulty modes that are available. *Nex Machina* certainly isn't easy (you'll need the 99 credits you're given on its standard difficulty) but it's never unfair and as you learn the levels and become accustomed to the hypnotic patterns you realise that it's all about creating as much space for yourself as possible, space that you can use to briefly recollect your thoughts and prepare yourself for the next punishing attack wave.

Brilliantly scaled, *Nex Machina* is the most thrilling, exhilarating shooter that we've ever played and it sets the benchmark by which all future examples of the genre will be judged – from its scintillating throbbing soundtrack and raucous sound effects, to its immensely satisfying multiplayer mode. While its roots are clearly in the past, it's undeniably modern and is filled with exceptional looking graphics and endless examples of creativity (outrunning a boulder being one of our favourite examples). It's the arcade shooter distilled down to its purest form. In short it's astonishing.

>> Score **100%**



» [PS4] The bosses are superb, each offering numerous attack patterns that need to be mastered.



» [PS4] That X will increase your multiplier. Pick up as many as you can to ensure the best possible score.

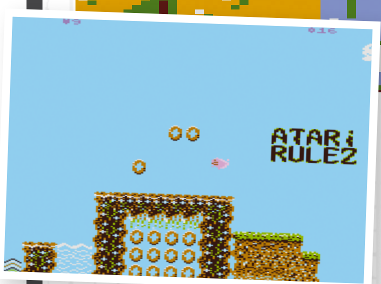
Gamers HOMEBREW

Brewing since 2005

Gaming NEWS



» [Atari 8-bit] Coin collecting in an inhospitable landscape.




» [Atari 8-bit] Every cat deserves to be fed doughnuts if they want them.




» [Atari 8-bit] It might not be arcade perfect, but *Time Pilot* still manages to impress.

# PLAYED ATARI TODAY

**The Wap-niak party took place in Poland near the start of May and, along with some graphical entries and a cluster of musical remixes, the event's game competition is worthy of attention since it brought forth some very interesting entries.** To begin with, there was the text adventure *Head Ache* which starts off simply enough in rather domestic surroundings with a man trying to deal with some pain, but soon takes a distressing, downwards turn. And staying with darker and more strategic titles for the moment, *Vox Regis* is in Polish, but, from what we gather, it's a game about making unpopular political decisions for the long-term good of the country.

Moving on to action-oriented titles, *Podskoczek* is a primitive-looking but interesting vertically-scrolling game where the player must ascend by jumping from platform to platform. The actual jumping is automated, so throw in a few special platforms that move or dissolve after being used a few times and making serious progress becomes trickier than it initially sounds. There's more platform action in *Hot & Cold Adventure*, although this time it's horizontal and sees a reptilian-looking creature make his way through some very nicely designed environments to collect coins while avoiding the patrolling enemies.

*Crazy Cat* is another platformer, but this time with multi-directional scrolling where the titular, pink feline wants to be fed a worryingly large quantity of doughnuts. Getting a cat to do something is usually difficult and, although it's under joystick control, keeping things heading in the right direction is a challenge due to a surprising turn of speed and some heavy inertia. Finally there is *Time Pilot*, a conversion of the classic arcade game which was the most impressive release; a few people have pointed out that it's not a perfect conversion of the arcade original, but we still enjoyed giving this one a quick blast and it even comes in standard and 65816 flavours for those with sped-up Atari 8-bits.

Overall, there was an interesting mixture of games offering quite a bit of variety, with even the three platformers being distinct in design from each other. Most of these games are considered to be works-in-progress so it'll be interesting to see final versions when they come out. Kikstart.eu/wapniak-2017 goes to the Atari Age forum thread where a link to all of the party's releases can be found.

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **darran.jones@futurenet.com**




» [C64] *Wolfenstein*, as you've never seen it before.

## WHAT'S THE TIME?

Owners of the C64 and a SuperCPU accelerator will probably want to have a look at *Wolf 3D*, a work-in-progress port of iD's seminal first-person shooter based on the original game's source code. Players can choose between four colours with beeper style sound or 16 colours with sampled sound and, although the latter's graphics aren't fully supported by Commodore emulator VICE at the time of writing, the game can still be played.

Kikstart.eu/wolf-scpu goes to the author's website where there is a download containing images and loading instructions.

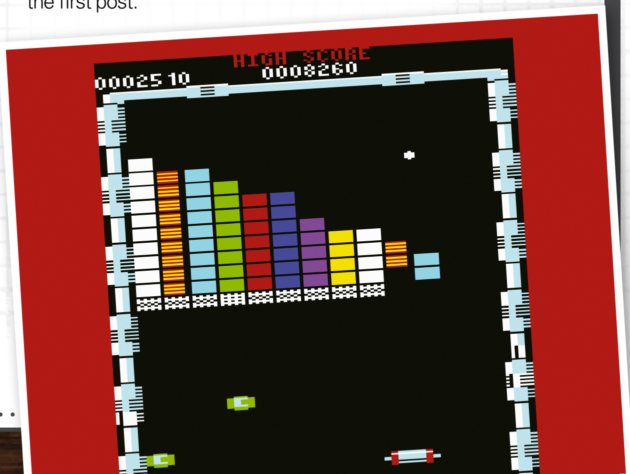
> **"Arukanoido is a very promising clone of Taito's brick-destroying coin-op Arkanoid"**

## VAUS SCRAMBLES AWAY

It's not finished yet but *Arukanoido* is a very promising clone of Taito's classic brick-destroying coin-op *Arkanoid*, converted to the VIC 20 with extra RAM. The latest version seems to be lacking the enemies but pretty much everything else is present and we were much impressed by both the graphics and ball movement.

The Denial forum thread about the game's development which started way back in August 2015 is behind Kikstart.eu/arukanoido-vic with a link to the most recent build of the code in the first post.

» [VIC-20] Taking my bat and ball, then going home.







» [ZX Spectrum] If only all Speccy games were this cheerful looking.

# HOMEBREW HEROES

**Mysterious Dimensions on the Spectrum (Kikstart.eu/dimensions-spec) caught our attention, so we grabbed developer Yerzmyey for a chat**



THE BIG INTERVIEW Yerzmyey

**Who was behind *Mysterious Dimensions* and how long did it take to make?**

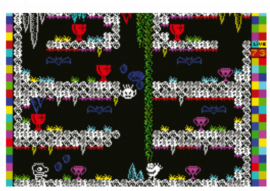
Well, I generated it myself including the idea, graphic, levels, fonts, chiptune music, digital music and the AGD code. Hellboj was involved in assembler coding, hacking the AGD engine and linking all the parts into one program. The beeper music is by Mister Beep project and Jonathan Cauldwell was a great moral and intellectual support for us.

The work took us something like one year or so. We made the program within the activity of Jagiellonian University's UBU-Lab that is dedicated to (among other things) the demo scene and retro platforms from the Eighties and Nineties.

**Where did the game's unique art style come from?**

This is the only style of graphics I'm able to make. On the other hand, most ZX Spectrum games have a black background which is usually nice but I missed the colour. I decided then to make something more… cheerful, than other ZX games.

The first level I wanted to make a bit in the *Super Mario Bros.* style. The second one was kind of inspired by *Gods* from the 16-bit computers. The third level was designed to be reminiscent of *Super Frog* on the Amiga. And the last one, for contrast, actually has the black background but it's because it is supposed to be 'dark', as the action takes a place in caves.



» [ZX Spectrum] Everybody needs a collection of chalices around the house.

**Were there any high or low points during the development?**

We had a big pause from game-making due to personal problems. After some time I got back to work and I also forced Hellboj to code. I wanted the game to be longer and it was supposed to have two more levels. The problem is, however, at some point I realised that I will release only four levels or otherwise I will never finish the game.

**What kind of feedback have you received?**

That the game is not that bad. Also – it's much simpler than our previous platform game for ZX Spectrum from 2012. Which is good, of course, as our previous platformer was a real killer and even I cannot walk through it nowadays even though it has 99 lives, exactly like *Mysterious Dimensions*.

**And finally, is there anything planned for the future you can tell our readers about?**

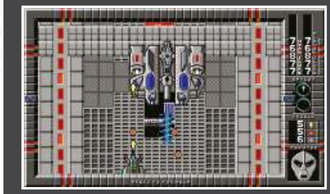
At the moment we're working on an elaborate *SF* text adventure for Spectrum 128K. The biggest problem will be to translate the game into the English language, which might be an expensive undertaking for me, but I hope it will be possible and the game might even be ready by the end of this year. The script is ready and now I'm working on graphics and music so later I will get talking to Hellboj again, to make him code the new game's engine.

# Gaming REVIEWS

## ·DO YOU· REMEMBER?

After serving in World War 3, Major Harrison Stryker is given a new task by Fleet Admiral Yoshira, travelling by wormhole to take on the Kreton forces in their home territories using a brand-new, untested spaceship. There's a lot of enemy blasting to be done along with regular boss battles and the ship can be upgraded through icons from downed enemies.

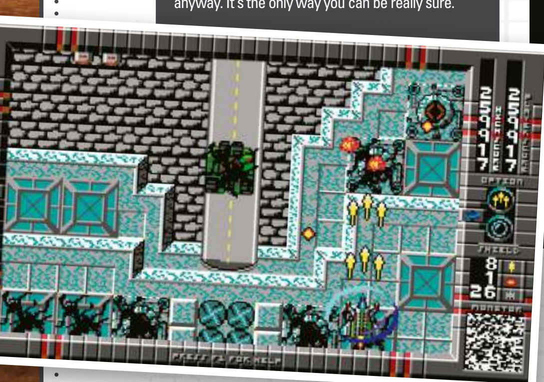
Originally released for DOS PCs in 1993, *Major Stryker* is a challenging, vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up with brightly coloured EGA graphics, multiple layers of parallax scrolling and Adlib sound from Apogee, the same company who later published *Raptor: Call Of The Shadows*. It's available for free after signing up at 3D Realms' website behind Kikstart.eu/stryker-3drealms or with Steam integration for a couple of pounds at Kikstart.eu/stryker-steam.

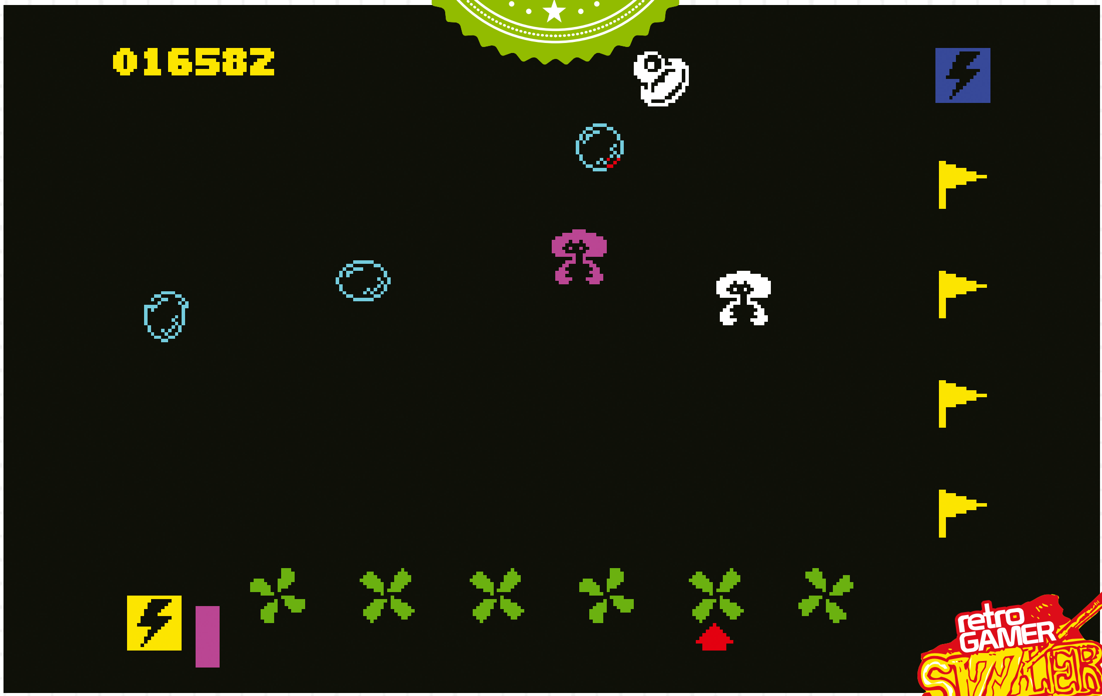


» [PC] This boss can be quite tough to defeat. Concentrate your fire to quickly destroy it.



» [PC] If it moves kill it. If it doesn't move, kill it anyway. It's the only way you can be really sure.

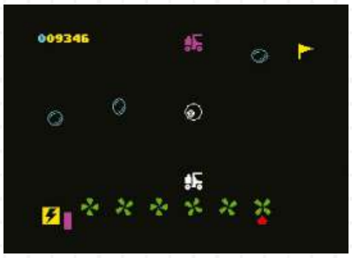





» [ZX Spectrum] Many defenceless bubbles were lost to these patrolling nasties.

# JUBBLES

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/JUBBLES-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE




» [ZX Spectrum] Marshalling the bubbles as they float through the level.




» [ZX Spectrum] It's always a pleasant surprise to discover a new game from Jonathan Cauldwell.

**The task set out by *Jubbles* is to guide bubbles as they drift from left to right across the screen so that they pop against the yellow flags and remove them from play.** This proves to be easier said than done because the player can't control the bubbles directly; instead they float slowly downwards and there's a row of six electric fans at the bottom of the screen which can be used to blow air wherever the player sees fit.

The early stages are simple enough because they're all about getting the player used to operating the fans and how the bubbles react – they accelerate and decelerate vertically so the overall effect on the bubble will differ depending on which fan is used – but it doesn't take long before some of those targets become harder to hit, either, due to their positioning or because they've started moving. Further bubble-bursting obstacles, in the form of static and patrolling objects, arrive shortly afterwards so success on the later stages will require some thought and careful timing.

There isn't a time limit to keep an eye on and the bubbles will just keep coming indefinitely, so the only way to lose the game is to run out of the electricity which keeps the fans running and that's shown as a gauge to the left of the fans themselves. A bursting bonus stage pops up regularly where the player doesn't have to worry about dying as they try to take down as many bubbles as possible for extra score before the timer expires.

We haven't seen many new Spectrum games from Jonathan Cauldwell recently, mostly in part because he's been busy working away on *Arcade Game Designer*, so it was a pleasant surprise for us to receive an email about this one. The visuals are sparse, but functional, and the soundtrack on AY-equipped machines is excellent, but as with all of Jonathan's games it's the gameplay where this really stands out and the unusual control method will keep players busy for a while.

» Score **91%**

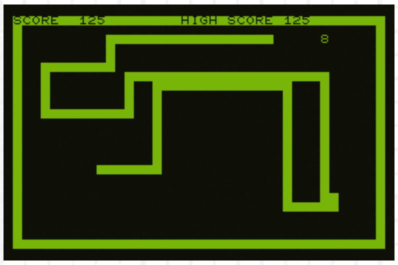
Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag darran.jones@futurenet.com



# PET SNAKE

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PET
» **DEVELOPER:** DONKEYSOFT » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SNAKE-PET



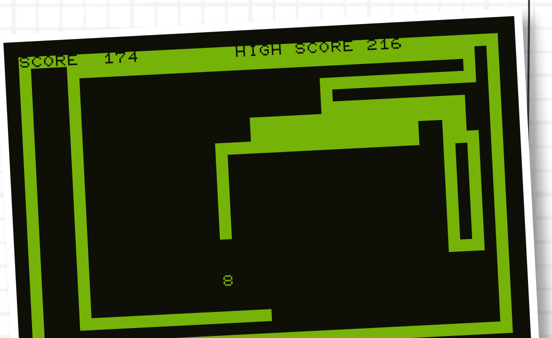

» [PET] Well, that's good news. *Snake* on Commodore PET.

***PET Snake* is, as might be suggested from the title, a version of the seminal *Snake* written for the Commodore PET, specifically a 16K machine with a 40-column display.** For those who have never owned a Nokia 3310, the titular reptile must gobble up tasty treats while avoiding its own tail which extends after each snack.

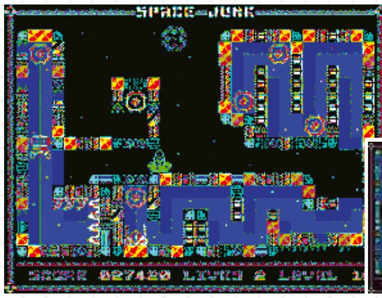
Those edible items are represented on the screen by numbers which will decrease over time. Grabbing large numbers is also a double-edged sword, since the value is added to both the score and tail length and further collection becomes even more difficult as the snake's own body starts getting in the way.

This version of *Snake* has the essentials to make it an entertaining challenge, but doesn't add any twists to the formula like some of the other recent variations on the theme like *Minesnake* for the Sharp MZ-80A have done which would have extended the longevity.

» Score **73%**




» [PET] It's hard to not tie a knot in the snake.



» [ZX Spectrum] The controls won't click immediately, but stick with it.



» [ZX Spectrum] Hiding in a corner and waiting for the nasties to pass.

# SPACE JUNK

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** MIGUETELO ART
» **PRICE:** FREE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SPACE-JUNK-SPEC

**Automated mining bases in the not-too-distant future that usually harvest resources for humanity have been hacked into, reprogrammed and essentially turned into Earth-destroying bombs.** To prevent this catastrophe the player has to guide a craft around each mining facility, moving through some very confined spaces while destroying the generators and avoiding or, in some cases, stunning the now hostile support droids.

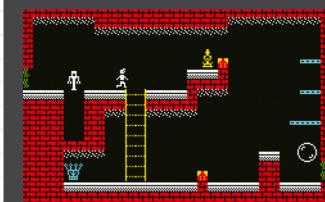
There is another problem to worry about, though, since the control system is more than a little quirky – selecting left, right, up or down is self-explanatory, but the direction the craft is currently facing and therefore firing is independent, based on current and previous input. This does make *Space Junk* frustrating, but after the penny drops those controls also make it stand out from other single-screen action games so players who want a little thought with their world-saving blasting should give this a try.

» Score **81%**

## ROUNDUP

How about a platform-based, archaeological quest to find and collect the legendary *Treasure Of Lumos* on the Spectrum? There are lots of dangers to be wary of, which will take some skill and timing to conquer because these adventures are never easy, but the riches to be gained if you're successful are worth it. Kikstart.eu/lumos-spec will locate a download.

There are more Spectrum-flavoured platforms in *Zabij Ducha* – which translates to English to 'Kill Ghost' – as well, but they constantly scroll and the player has to jump over the gaps to avoid plummeting to their doom while at the same time weaving between a couple of spectres as they float around. Kikstart.eu/ducha-spec heads over to the WOS forum discussion for more information.



# EL TESORO PERDIDO DE CUAUTHEMOC

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** 4MHZ » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TESORO-PERDIDO-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE

**It's time to raid a few tombs in search of riches, but also run into all manner of less-than-pleasant wildlife and other hazards along the way.** The map initially seems quite small but those wily tomb builders have installed hidden buttons which need to be pushed to progress. And there's a few items which will come in handy as well, including bullets, dynamite and scuba gear – although who leaves these things lying around an ancient tomb without nicking all the treasures is anyone's guess.

Fans of *Rick Dangerous* will want to explore *El Tesoro Perdido De Cuauthemoc* because it has a similar feel to Core's game; the explorer is more hardy than Mr Dangerous and there are thankfully very few places where the safe path needs trial and error to discover. Overall, this is an excellent collect-'em-up with some superb graphics throughout and a solid soundtrack.

» Score **92%**



» [Amstrad CPC] "Don't tell me truth hurts, little girl, 'cause it hurts like hell."



» [Amstrad CPC] How do I get to the useful-looking scuba diving kit?

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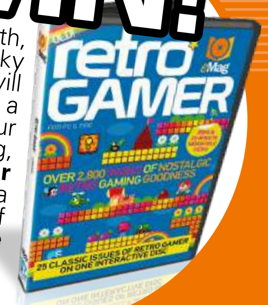




# MAILBAG

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## STAR LETTER

## HANDHELD HEAVEN

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
First off, I'd like to say that I love your magazine. It's full of interesting features and I'm always impressed by the sheer amount of people you get to talk to every issue. Having said that, there is one area of the magazine that I feel you're rather weak on, namely handheld gaming, which has been a huge part of my life growing up.

I can't remember the last time you did a big behind-the-scenes look at a classic handheld game, which is quite disappointing as a long-time reader. I personally love handheld gaming and it's clear that many members of the team do as well, so why is there so little coverage in the magazine? I know we've had minority reports on many of the available handhelds, but it's not enough content for me and I'd love to see handheld classics like *Super Mario Land* and *GG Shinobi* getting their own standalone features. I've noticed the odd Game Boy Advance piece every now and then, which is much appreciated, but what I'd really love to see is big pieces on the PSP and Nintendo DS. One of them was the biggest-selling handheld of all time, so it's odd that it's had very little coverage in the magazine.

Jason Cooper



» [Game Boy] Simon feels games like *Super Mario Land* need more coverage. Do you agree?

**Hi Jason. The main reason we don't cover handheld games as often as traditional releases is because of lack of access. There are lots of titles for which we'd love to do making ofs or ultimate guides, but we pride ourselves on our developer access first and foremost, and this can be quite tough if the games originated in Japan. There's nothing stopping us from doing smaller features, though, and we know Darran is itching to get more DS and PSP coverage into the magazine. Watch this space and have an eMag to read while you're waiting.**







## TWO-PAGE BLISS

I would just like to say I'm really liking the tight two-page spread format used with the recent *Chimera* article – issue 169. Like many of your 8-bit generation readership, and balancing a busy working and family life plus a love of retro gaming, it's good to see bite-size and accessible articles to fit the five minutes between walking the dog and getting the kids' dinner ready.

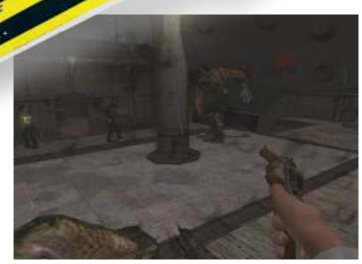
Although quite a subjective opinion, it really did fit the bill and was a great balance of facts, interview and anecdote, mixing well with the more expansive coverage throughout the issue.

What's next? Perhaps 'The history of *Manic Miner*' in a single tweet? Only joking by the way.

Keep up the good work Paul, Darran and team.

Martin Atkinson

**Glad to hear you enjoy the format, Martin. We tend to do one of these every few months when a suitable game comes along, but maybe we could make them a more regular thing.**



» [PC] An article about *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth* will appear in a future issue of the issue.

## CTHULHU QUERIES

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
Now that there is a new *Call Of Cthulhu* game coming out, I was wondering if you'd consider running an article on *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth*, which was released on PC and console as an Xbox exclusive. It's a fantastic survival-horror game and one of my favourite Xbox releases. I'd be eternally grateful if you could feature it in the magazine in some way.

Mike Tooley

**You're in luck, Mike: Darran is a big fan of the game himself and we've had a making-of planned for quite a few months. Expect to see a proper feature about it by the end of the year.**

## SHOOT TO THRILL

Hi Darran,
I have bought the magazine from issue one onwards and have a subscription. My heart belongs to the ZX Spectrum,

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although I've had a dozen consoles since then. So, the gaming highlight of the last year has been *Project ZX* by Richard Langford. I have not seen a review and wonder if there are plans to cover this masterpiece? On a positive note, I loved the *Horace* piece recently and thought for a minute you were going to find William Tang!

Michael

**We've not covered *Project ZX* in the magazine, but we are aware of it. We're aiming to get something together for a later issue, so watch this space.**

## NAME THAT GAME

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I'm trying to find out the name of a game. I think it was on the C64. I'm afraid I don't have much to describe. Basically it was a platform game where it was a character, who I'm sure was holding a candle and navigating through a castle or mansion.

From what I remember (this was over 18 years ago), you had to search for car parts and build a car. There were two choices of car: a sports car, or a type of vintage car.

I'm sorry that's not much to go on. Thanks for any help you can give me.

Lee Wiseman

**Worry not, Lee, for we know exactly which game you're talking about. It's *Olli & Lissa 3: The Candlelight Adventure*, which was coded by Simon Clarke and released in 1990. Hope it's as good as you remember.**

## VEGA WOES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Will the Vega Plus surface as predicted for its supposed summer release on the RCL page with the backers receiving theirs early, or will the ongoing legal turmoil delay it further? Only time will tell if it goes the same way as the Coleco Chameleon!

Cisko Kidd

**It does seem like time is running out for the Vega Plus to hit its summer deadline. Needless to say, we'll be running a full story on the saga in a later issue of the magazine once all the problems surrounding it have been resolved.**

## DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

### Darran's DS Collection

**Not content with collecting original Xbox, Game Boy Advance and PS Vita games, Darran has now turned his attention to the DS. Originally content to collect both American and European titles, he had something of a crisis halfway through his collecting and suddenly decided he could only live with the uniformity of the American and Japanese releases. Who knows what he'll be collecting next issue…**






» We last covered the Vega Plus in issue 153. A lot has happened since then…



# From the forum

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies...**

## What's your favourite Commodore 64 game?

**paranoid marvin**

*Enduro Racer* and *Chase HQ*, because they showed how much better the Speccy was! *Buggy Boy* showed how a game could be translated from the arcade in a format that was perfect for far less powerful home machines. *Wizball* – unbelievable music, amazing graphics, fantastic gameplay – and pissed all over the 'superior' 16-bit machine's conversion.

**Crusty Starfish**

*Entombed* by Ultimate Play the Game. Chunky graphics but boy was that an atmospheric game! Also *Master of Magic* by Mastertronic, as it had that haunting and very long Hubbard soundtrack to draw you into a £1.99 bargain.

**NorthWay**

*Impossible Mission, Dropzone.* Lots of others.

**fredghostmaster**

Never owned a Commodore 64 but always looked forward to playing *Graham Gooch's Cricket* round my mate's house, after school.

**RichL**

Oh my word… *Ghosts n' Goblins* ('coz of the POKE I used to use to destroy all enemies on screen (POKE 4242,42 SYS 2128)). *Skool Daze* (I was still at school, come on – naming the teachers after my own). *Bubble Bobble* (I won a copy in a *Zzap!64* competition all those years ago). *Parallax* (that title music man...). *Delta* (ditto to *Parallax*!). *Wizball* (because!).

**Mayhem**

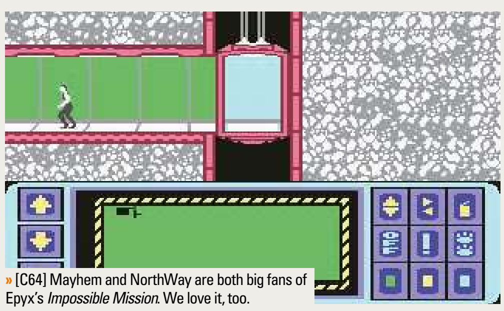
*Impossible Mission*, for pixel-perfect platforming par excellence. *IK+*, for triple-threat thumping chaos. And *Project Firestart*, for… well, seeing 'danger' written in blood within the first two minutes means the whole thing's gone to hell in a handcart very quickly. And you're in the middle of it.

**kiwimike**

*Castle Wolfenstein* and *Lode Runner*, along with a few Infocom adventures for me. When we had games nights, we used to play the likes of *Paperboy, Buggy Boy, DK* and *Mario Brothers*.

**mrmessy**

*Dropzone*. I did not play it back in the day. I first played it about ten years ago. To me, it is THE stand-out game on the C64.



» [C64] Mayhem and NorthWay are both big fans of Epyx's *Impossible Mission*. We love it, too.


**retro GAMER**

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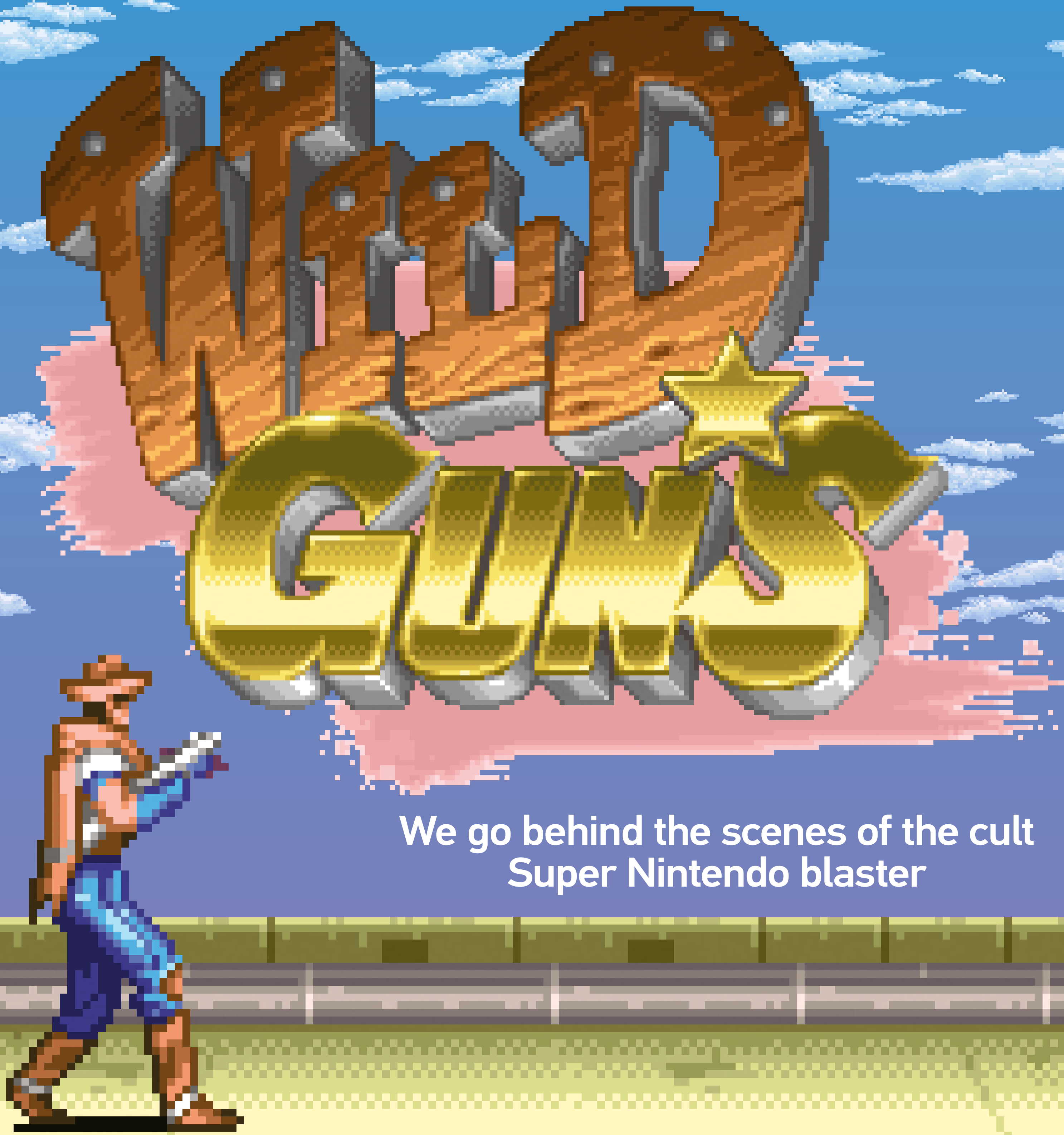
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# ENDGAME




## METAL SLUG X

» There's one simple rule to follow when dealing with aliens who want to invade your planet: don't form an alliance with them. Unfortunately, General Morden isn't the brightest tool in the shed, and has formed a pact with the Mars People to wipe out the Peregrine Falcon squad for good. How well does that work out for him? Let's skip to the end of this SNK classic to find out…




01

» After failing to follow our golden rule, Morden is somehow still surprised by the consequences of his actions: an alien invasion, complete with gigantic mothership. Thankfully, one of his pilots is willing to make a heroic sacrifice…




02

» Having seen *Independence Day*, the pilot figured that flying his plane into the mothership's cannon would bring it down, and he wasn't wrong. An enormous explosion engulfs the battlefield, bringing an end to the interplanetary hostilities.




03

» The Mars People's transport ship manages to detach from the mothership in time to avoid complete obliteration, but it's still far too damaged to fly away and quickly explodes – and lucky us, there's even a special treat inside the vessel!




04

» A captive General Morden is ejected from the wrecked craft, to the rapturous applause of the six grunts that didn't perish during this insane conflict. Our heroine Fio doesn't shoot, safe in the knowledge that he'll easily be taken in alive. Just desserts for instigating this needless war, really.




05

» To the horror of his men, Morden falls flat. Now all that's left is for the two sides to rebuild their shattered communities following this entirely stupid battle – a conflict which could easily have been completely avoided if the bad guys had just followed a very simple rule. Idiots.

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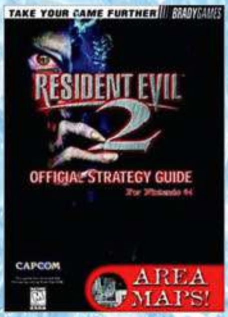
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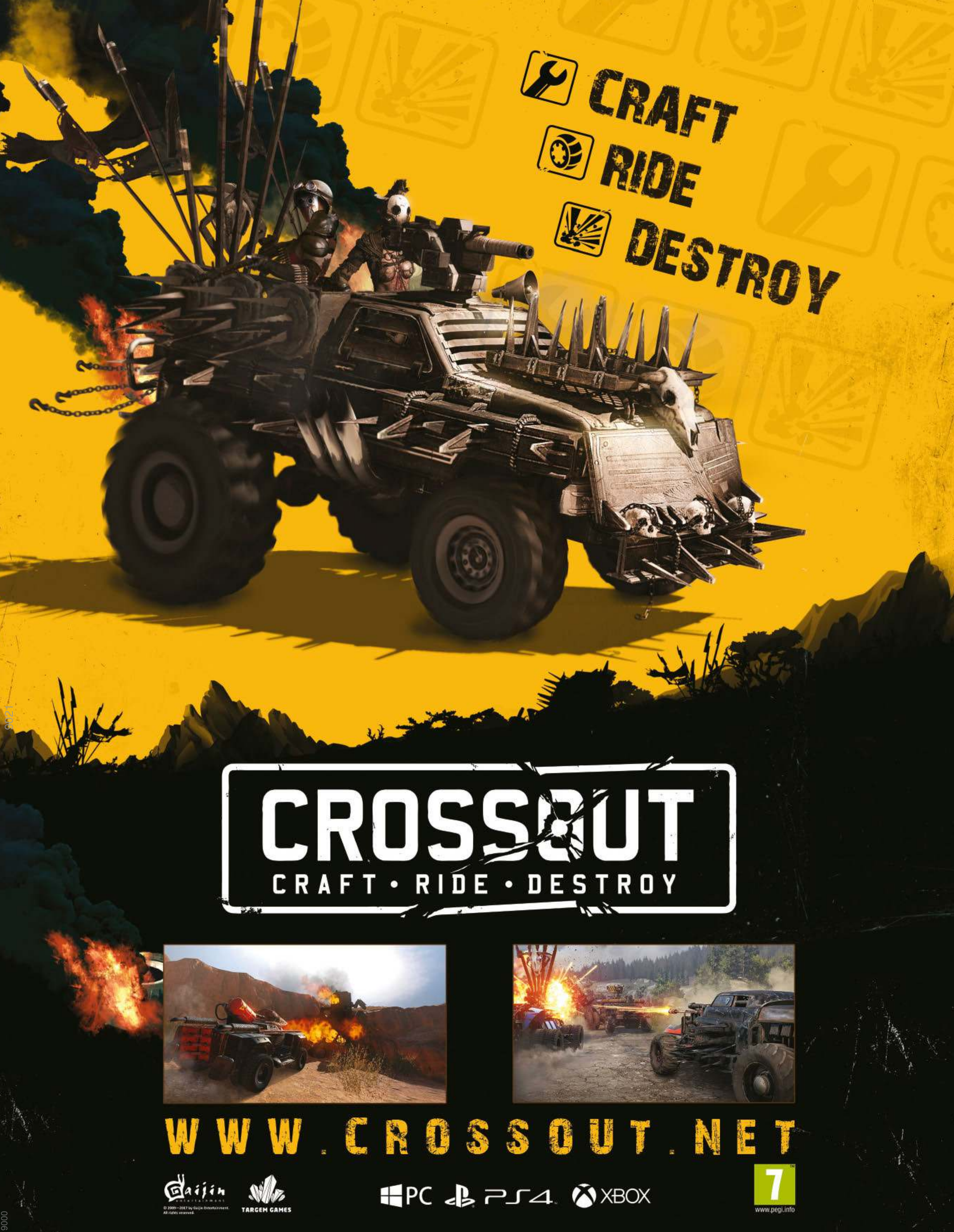

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